



EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

No. 3491

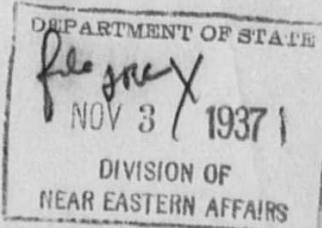
LONDON, October 22, 1937.

SUBJECT: Italian activity in Libya.

FOR DISTRIBUTION - CHICK Yes No

To the Field  
In U. S. A.

Rome  
Cairo



American Embassy  
American Legation

RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
A-M/C  
NOV 11 1937  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE  
Sir:

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

Honorable

The Secretary of State,  
Washington, D. C.

Copy Transmitted by the  
Commercial Office (A-M/C)

To

Rome  
Cairo

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of  
the Department's instruction No. 1969 of October 7,  
1937, relative to the Department's desire to have such  
information as may be discreetly obtained concerning  
the recent Italian military activity in Libya.

1/ There is transmitted herewith a copy of a G-2  
report, dated October 21, 1937, prepared by the Military  
Attaché for the War Department. This report represents  
the best opinion available to the Embassy on the recent  
Italian manoeuvres in Libya. In summary it points

out

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*note  
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out (1) that the presence of a large body of Italian troops in Libya has a definite nuisance value, both to Great Britain and to France, and (2) in trans-shipping troops to Spain transports from Libya are less apt to be detected than troop ships sailing from Italian ports.

6/

Several clippings from the British press bearing on this subject are likewise enclosed.

Respectfully yours,

*Herschel V. Johnson*  
Herschel V. Johnson  
Chargé d'Affaires ad interim

7 ✓  
Enclosures:

1. G-2 Report No. 39020, dated October 21, 1937.
2. Article from Daily Telegraph & Morning Post dated October 16, 1937.
3. Article from London Times dated October 16, 1937.
4. Article from Manchester Guardian dated October 12, 1937.
5. Article from Manchester Guardian dated October 14, 1937.
6. Article from Daily Mail dated October 14, 1937.
7. Article from London Times dated October 15, 1937.

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*J.V.L.*

# CONFIDENTIAL

The Military Attaché  
London.

G-2 Report.

Enclosure No. 1... to despatch No. .... of 10/22/37  
from the Embassy at London, England.

3491

## Current Miscellaneous Item.

Italian Maneuvers in the Mediterranean.

6760.

Conversations with various officers on duty in the War Office all point to the fact that the British Government has been in a rather nervous condition during the recent negotiations of the Non-Intervention Committee.

In a conference with probably the best informed military source in London today, the gist of his opinion was as follows:

The Mediterranean situation, with particular reference to Mussolini's maneuvers and objectives form the source of a deep concern to the British Government, a concern which is far more immediate than over either Palestine or the Far East.

Mussolini has the advantage of the initiative and the British, owing to their large commitments and unfortunate condition of military weakness, are in no position to counter his moves with the vigor which would be most desirable.

There is no doubt that he is considerably encouraged by his success in Abyssinia, in Spain and possibly by his recent reception in Germany. Probably the most important reason for the increased vigor of his activities, however, is his realization that if he is to force such concessions from the British as recognition of Abyssinia and Italy's primacy in the Mediterranean area, he must do so before British re-armament is achieved, that is to say by 1940 or thereabouts.

It will be remembered that as long ago as 1930, Mussolini announced that he was preparing his country for an emergency which would occur between 1935 and 1940.

His intentions in Libya are not entirely clear but it is not believed that he has any immediate positive intentions against either Tunis or Egypt. A stroke against Egypt would involve an operation along the coast or a desert campaign. The coast route would only be successful in case he controlled the sea, which he does not, and a desert campaign would involve not only control of the sea, but a most hazardous venture with its innumerable complications of water, food and other supply. Furthermore, it is not believed that he is prepared to go to war with a French-British coalition.

On the whole it is believed that his reinforcement of the Libyan garrison has been undertaken chiefly for its nuisance value in his negotiations with France and England and possibly in order that he may ship additional forces to Spain from Libya without discovery, should this be desirable in the future.

From: M.A. London.

Report No. 39020.

October 21, 1937.

# CONFIDENTIAL

# CONFIDENTIAL

The Military Attaché

London.

Concerning recent troop movements, the opinion was expressed that although the headquarters of two corps (the XX and XXI) might be in Libya, the troops concerned would not run to more than four divisions. It was stated categorically that it is impossible for Italian troops to leave Italy or land in Spain without their arrival being known to the British War Office.

In this connection, it was remarked that the British are still confident that there are 70,000 Italians with Franco and give no credence to Mussolini's statement that there are only 40,000.

In response to a query as to what effect yesterday's concessions by Mussolini might have on the general situation, the reply was that this was only a temporary easement of the situation and due only to the fact that he was not quite ready for a final showdown.

Replying to a question as to how far Italy could go before a showdown was forced on her, the answer was that this was impossible to say but that everyday worked against her and in favor of the Franco-British position.

Summary: The British are very apprehensive concerning the Mediterranean area, will remain so until their rearmament gives them a predominant force there, and will not allow their attention to be diverted to the Far East and Palestine until this nearer problem is solved. It is evident also from this conversation, as well as many others, that they place little confidence in the rectitude and integrity of the Italian Government and are contemplating considerable anxiety and trouble from this source for the next year or two.

Source: Reliable. See Confidential Letter No. 39027, dated October 31, 1937.

From: M.A. London.

Report No. 39020.

October 31, 1937.

# CONFIDENTIAL

3491

Enclosure No. 2 to despatch No. .... of 10/22/37..  
from the Embassy at London, England.  
PAPER: DAILY TELEGRAPH & MORNING POST NUMBER:

CITY: LONDON

DATE: OCT 16 1937

## ANGLO-FRENCH PROPOSALS

### SUBMISSION TO THE POWERS TO-DAY

### VON RIBBENTROP'S RETURN

By Our DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Non-Intervention Sub-Committee, consisting of representatives of nine Powers, will meet at the Foreign Office at 10.30 this morning to make a further attempt to agree on means of ending foreign intervention in Spain.

Herr von Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador, returned to London by air from Berlin last night to represent Germany at the meeting.

The Earl of Plymouth, chairman of the Committee, representing Britain, and M. Corbin, the French Ambassador, will make similar statements proposing that the Committee should decide at once on:

Immediate "token" withdrawals of foreign combatants from both sides;

The appointment of commissions to arrange for the progressive withdrawal of the remaining volunteers; and

The grant of conditional belligerent rights at sea to both sides as soon as substantial progress has been made with the evacuations.

Britain and France will both make it clear that they regard the question as of extreme urgency. Lord Plymouth will probably suggest that the Committee, as on previous occasions, should fix a date by which final decisions should be sought.

If by that date no agreement has been reached Britain and France are expected to declare that they must resume their liberty of action.

## ROME POLICY WITHDRAWALS LEFT TO GEN. FRANCO

From Our Own Correspondent

ROME, Friday.

An indication of Italy's policy at tomorrow's meeting in London was given to-night, when a responsible official said that a "token" withdrawal of Italian volunteers would be Gen. Franco's concern, not Italy's. It would rest with him to command them to leave Spanish territory.

Reports published in London that 5,000 Italian "volunteers" had landed in Spain were dismissed as

Enclosure No. 3 to despatch No. 3491 of 10/22/37.  
from the Embassy at London, England.  
PAPER: THE TIMES NUMBER:

CITY: LONDON

DATE: OCT 16 1937

## ITALIAN TROOPS FOR LIBYA

### 2,300 MORE SAIL

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

ROME, Oct. 15

Another 2,300 troops left Naples for Libya this evening on board the steamer Sannio to reinforce, it is stated, the XX Army Corps there.

Meanwhile, there is much speculation here among foreign observers as to the nature of the "necessities of an international character" which, in the words of the semi-official bulletin *L'Informazione Diplomatica* [quoted in *The Times* on October 9], are prompting Italy to reinforce her garrisons in Libya. Authoritative Italian circles are reticent on the subject and merely refer to the creation, announced last April, of the XX Army Corps. No precise information was forthcoming to-day about yesterday's reports that some of the troops are destined to form part of a XXI Army Corps, and the tendency of the usual sources of information is to take refuge behind the law which prohibits the divulgence of unauthorized news of military interest.

Enclosure No. 4 to despatch No. 3401 of 10/22/37  
from the Embassy at London, England.

PAPER: MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

NUMBER:

CITY: LONDON

DATE: OCT 12 1937

### Troops for Libya

Some six thousand Italian troops yesterday sailed from Naples for Libya, or so, at least, it is said. There are, of course, other alternatives which no one with any experience of Signor Mussolini's foreign policy would altogether exclude. These troops, or some of them, may be intended for Spain, though it is hardly likely that Signor Mussolini would thus advertise their departure. They may be destined for Abyssinia, for it is now well established that the Italians are experiencing considerable difficulties in pacifying their new empire, and it is even reported that Marshal Graziani has asked for reinforcements. During the last twelve months most of the Italian troops have been withdrawn on account of the cost and the European situation, but it is probable that the African troops have not stood the test of a trying summer. Signor Mussolini would not willingly admit this necessity, but it would be difficult to keep secret as any troopships sailing to Abyssinia must pass through the Suez Canal. On the whole, therefore, one may accept Libya as the destination for the 6,000; in any case, they will only make up a total of some 24,000 who have gone there in the last three weeks. It remains to find a reason for these reinforcements. Ever since the sanctions crisis in 1935 Italy has used the threat to Egypt through Libya as a diplomatic weapon. When, in the autumn of that year, the British Government concentrated the fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean Italy countered by sending reinforcements to Libya. At the time this action was said to be "in view of the unrest manifested by certain native exiles of Cyrenaica," but it is a fair indication of the real reason that shortly afterwards, in an interview with a French paper, Signor Mussolini offered to "reduce our effectives in Libya" in return for "a partial demobilisation" of the British Fleet. After the crisis was over Italy actually did withdraw some of these "effectives."

But the idea was not forgotten. When, in March this year, Signor Mussolini visited Libya he motored along the great coastal road which leads up to the Egyptian frontier and gazed (fully conscious of the dramatic effect) over into Egyptian territory. Shortly after his return to Italy it was announced that a national army corps would be organised in Libya, and on September 18 the first 3,000 men sailed. Unfortunately, some careless papers said that they were being sent "for Mediterranean defence" before it was officially announced that this was false and that the troops were merely the first instalment of the promised army corps. In the last three weeks more troops have been sent, and a few days ago an official assurance was offered to Egypt:

Even if circumstances compelled Italy to send other troops, it should not alarm Egypt. . . . It is only for the necessity of an international character—extraneous to the position and policy of Egypt—that Italy is reinforcing, and if need arises will further reinforce, her garrison in Libya.

Of this assurance one may note that for the first time Italy makes no attempt to hide her purpose. The troops are not going "in view of unrest in Cyrenaica" nor to make up an army corps according to previous arrangements; they are "reinforce-

was false and that the troops were merely the first instalment of the promised army corps. In the last three weeks more troops have been sent, and a few days ago an official assurance was offered to Egypt:

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Of this assurance one may note that for the first time Italy makes no attempt to hide her purpose. The troops are not going "in view of unrest in Cyrenaica" nor to make up an army corps according to previous arrangements; they are "reinforcements," and they are going "for the necessity of an international character"—in short, to threaten Britain. How far one should be impressed by the threat is another question. It is quite clear that an invasion of Egypt from Libya could only be undertaken safely if Italy had gained both naval and aerial control of the Mediterranean. If she could secure this mastery, such an invasion might have some meaning; if not, the presence of troops in Libya at all could only handicap Italy, for they would have to be supplied by sea. But in any case these Libyan manœuvres seem a form of diplomacy which is not likely to impress the British Government overmuch.

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Enclosure No. 5 to despatch No. ... of 10/22/37  
from the Embassy at London, England.

PAPER: MANCHESTER GUARDIAN NUMBER:

CITY: LONDON

DATE: OCT 14 1937

## ANOTHER ARMY FOR LIBYA

From a Diplomatic Correspondent

LONDON, WEDNESDAY.

There is good ground for believing that the Italian Government is going to send a further army corps to Libya. The decision has been taken in Rome, but the Italian Command has not made up its mind whether the new army corps—the 21st—shall be composed of two or three divisions.

Even if the new army corps should consist of two divisions only, Italy's troops in Libya would then number about four times as many as the troops France has in Tunis.

### 4,000 MORE ITALIANS SAIL

NAPLES, OCTOBER 13.

Surprise was caused to-night by the announcement that the headquarters staff of the Cirene division has sailed

for Tripoli in addition to 4,000 more men to reinforce the Libya garrison.

There had been no previous indication that this division was to be sent. Its presence will raise the strength of the garrison from three to four divisions, which means that the number of troops in Libya will then be well over 60,000. The peak figure reached during the Anglo-Italian crisis in 1935-6, when the British Home Fleet was in the Mediterranean, was 68,000.

The divisional headquarters staff left in the liner Roma, together with 2,032 officers and men comprising two battalions of the division's 225th Infantry Regiment.

The Roma had been engaged in Mediterranean cruises, but on disembarking her passengers a few days ago she was taken over for troop transport. Another battalion of the 225th Regiment sailed in the Caesario, which carried 1,180 officers and men to Bengasi. The Cagliari is also sailing with 700 officers and men of the 85th Infantry Regiment.  
—Reuter.

Enclosure No. 6 to despatch No. .... of 10/32/37.  
from the Embassy at London, England.

PAPER: DAILY MAIL

NUMBER:

CITY: LONDON

DATE: OCT 14 1937

## 60,000 ITALIANS IN LIBYA

NAPLES, Wednesday.

**S**URPRISE was caused this evening by the announcement that the headquarters staff of the Cirene Division had sailed for Tripoli to-day, in addition to 4,000 more men to reinforce the Libya garrison.

There had been no previous indication that the Cirene Division was to be sent to Libya or was there already.

Its presence will raise the strength of the garrison from three to four divisions (more than 60,000 troops).

The divisional headquarters staff left in the liner Roma, together with 2,032 officers and men comprising two battalions of the 225th Infantry Regiment of the Cirene Division. The remainder of the 4,000 men left in two other ships.—Reuter.

3491

enclosure No. 7 to despatch No. .... of 10/22/37  
from the Embassy at London, England NUMBER:  
PAPER: THE TIMES

CITY: LONDON

DATE: OCT 15 1937

## MORE ITALIAN TROOPS FOR LIBYA

### 10,000 IN 24 HOURS

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

ROME, Oct. 14

Italian troops are continuing to leave for Libya. This afternoon the steamer Nazzario Sauro sailed with 1,523 men of the 85th and 86th Infantry, and the 42nd Artillery Regiment, and later the Argentina left with 1,485 men of the 115th Infantry and the 44th Artillery Regiment. Finally 4,000 men of the 157th Infantry and the 45th and 63rd Artillery Regiments embarked in the Lombardia.

It is noteworthy that while the first two ships carried units of the XX Army Corps, the troops in the Lombardia are described as part of the XXI Corps, the constitution of which, as part of the Libyan garrison, has not yet been announced.

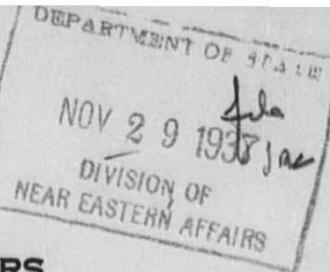
With the departure in the last 24 hours for Libya of over 10,000 men, the strength of the Italian military forces there is rapidly approaching the figure it was reported to have reached during the Abyssinian war.

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NOV 5 - 1937  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

MR. WILSON

1937 NOV 29 DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS



DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS  
Mr. Welles:

Mr. Wilson:

UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE  
NOV 5 1937

November 5, 1937

ADVISER ON POLITICAL RELATIONS  
MR. DUNN  
NOV 10 1937  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

We have now had a reply from London in answer to our inquiry concerning the recent reinforcement of the Italian garrison in Lybia. The reply encloses a report of our Military Attaché in London based on his conversation on October 21st "with probably the best informed military source in London today".

The following are the highlights of the Military Attaché's report:

The Mediterranean situation, with particular reference to Mussolini's maneuvres and objectives form the source of a deep concern to the British Government, a concern which is far more immediate than over either Palestine or the Far East.

Mussolini has the advantage of the initiative and the British, owing to their large commitments and unfortunate condition of military weakness, are in no position to counter his moves with the vigor which would be most desirable.

There is no doubt that he is considerably encouraged by his success in Abyssinia, in Spain and possibly by his recent reception in Germany. Probably the most important reason for the increased vigor of his activities, however, is his realization that if he is to force such concessions from the British as recognition of Abyssinia and Italy's primacy in the Mediterranean area he must do so before British rearmament is achieved, that is to say by 1940 or thereabouts.

.....  
His intentions in Lybia are not entirely clear but it is not believed that he has any

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immediate

immediate positive intentions against either Tunis or Egypt. A stroke against Egypt would involve an operation along the coast or a desert campaign. The coast route would only be successful in case he controlled the sea, which he does not, and a desert campaign would involve not only control of the sea, but a most hazardous venture with its innumerable complications of water, food and other supply. Furthermore, it is not believed that he is prepared to go to war with a French-British coalition.

On the whole it is believed that his reinforcement of the Lybian garrison has been undertaken chiefly for its nuisance value in his negotiations with France and England and possibly in order that he may ship additional forces to Spain from Lybia without discovery, should this be desirable in the future.

In this connection, it was remarked that the British are still confident that there are 70,000 Italians with Franco and give no credence to Mussolini's statement that there are only 40,000.

Replying to a question as to how far Italy could go before a showdown was forced on her, the answer was that this was impossible to say but that every day worked against her and in favor of the Franco-British (French-British) position.

The belief expressed that Italy has no positive intentions against either Tunis or Egypt is in accord with the conclusions advanced in the Division's memorandum of October 29, 1937. The view that the strengthening of the Lybian garrison has been due to its nuisance value is that of our own Military Intelligence Division which has expressed doubt that part of the Lybian troops may be destined for Spain. M.I.D. has held rather to the view that if they are to be used elsewhere at all they may be intended for Ethiopia.

*Paul H. Alling*  
Paul H. Alling

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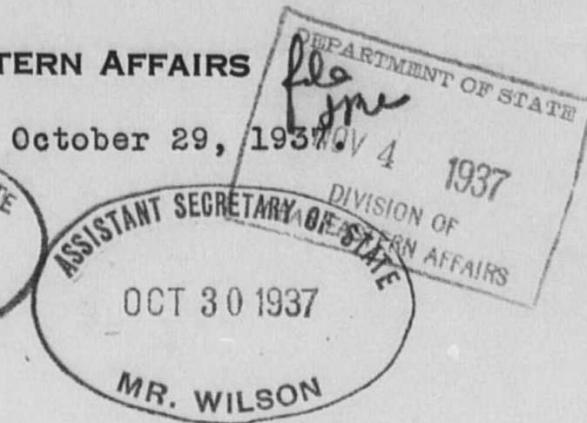
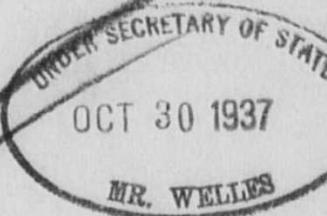
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

1937 NOV 4 AM 9 33

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS  
Mr. Welles:

Mr. Wilson:



October 29, 1937 NOV 4 1937

Subject: Reaction in Egypt to the Italian Reinforcement of the Lybian Garrison.

According to a despatch dated October 15th which has been received from our Chargé d'Affaires ad interim in Cairo, which is attached, the recent Italian reinforcement of the Lybian garrison beginning in September has aroused no little perturbation in Egypt both amongst Egyptian officials as well as on the part of British military authorities there. The official explanation given by the Italian Government on October 7th from Rome that Egypt had nothing to fear and that the reinforcement has been determined through "necessities of the international situation" has, it appears, served rather to arouse than to allay Egyptian apprehensions.

The Chargé estimates that prior to the Ethiopian crisis the Italian military establishment in Lybia comprised some 20,000 troops, a large number of whom were natives. He quotes a British military authority to the effect that at the height of the Ethiopian war Italian effectives in Lybia

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reached a number of 67,000. The Legation estimates that, with the recent reinforcements, the Italian garrison in Lybia will comprise 60,000 regular troops, exclusive of 12,000 native troops. This estimate agrees substantially with that given in the despatch of October 8, 1937, from the Embassy in Rome (the subject of the Division's memorandum of October 25, 1937) wherein Italian regular troops, consequent upon the reinforcements, were estimated as numbering from 50,000 to 80,000 but where the figure for colonial troops were given as 25,000.

The Legation further reports that the Chief of the British Military Mission in Egypt, General Cornwall, "is understood to have recommended to the War Office in London during the past few days that additional British troops be despatched to Egypt and that the military preparations of the Egyptian Government be hastened".

The Legation states that at present there are some 10,000 British troops in Egypt. This is approximately comparable with the number of Egyptian effectives, of whom a small detachment is stationed at Solloum on the Egyptian-Lybian frontier.

At the time of the Ethiopian crisis the British converted Mersa Matruh, a point on the Mediterranean coast about half way between Alexandria and Solloum, into a highly fortified military base. At the same time a narrow gauge railway was extended from a point west of Alexandria to Mersa Matruh. At present a desert track

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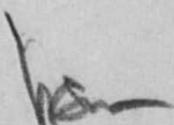
extends from Alexandria to Mersa Matruh and Solloum but one of the provisions of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty provides for the improvement by Egypt of the road from Alexandria to Mersa Matruh where the main British defense of Egypt in the west would be organized as it was in 1935-1936. A member of the British Embassy staff in Egypt has informed the Legation upon returning from a visit to Mersa Matruh on October 14th that "there was very little evidence of military activity in that area west of Alexandria" and that the road, while safe enough in dry weather, "is very poor and requires careful drivers".

The Chargé d'Affaires adds that an excellent road is reported to exist on the Lybian side leading to the Egyptian frontier (a part of the highway officially inaugurated by the Duce early this year). He states also that the Italian Army has recently established an airport opposite Solloum in Lybia and that further airports are under construction in southeastern Lybia at Jarabub and Kufra, ostensibly in preparation for a commercial air line from Tripoli via the Sudan to Ethiopia. He remarks that while some Italian activities are reported at Gharlan in western Lybia near the Tunisian frontier, most of the activity would appear to be in the neighborhood of Egypt and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

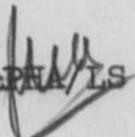
It will be recalled that M.I.D. recently expressed the view that the new Italian troops in Lybia were not to be used

against

against France or Great Britain since these troops were being equipped for garrison duty and not for desert service. Whatever the reason for the despatch of these troops to Lybia, their presence there is apparently having the effect of drawing Egypt closer towards Great Britain, thus effectively counteracting so far as Egypt is concerned the bid of Italy for the friendship of the Arab world.



Wallace Murray



JRC&PMA/LS



THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

NOV 29 1937

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

HISTORICAL ADVISER

No. 624.

NOV 29 1937

Subject: Military and Strategic Importance of Libya.

DEPT. OF STATE

AMERICAN EMBASSY

ROME, October 29, 1937.

NOV 29 1937  
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To the Field

In U. S. A.

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NOV 23 1937

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
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Division of  
Near Eastern Affairs

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

In compliance with the Department's instruction No. 191 of October 7, 1937, with which was enclosed a copy of a report concerning Libya published in the London DAILY HERALD of September 8, 1937, and supplementing the Embassy's despatch No. 599 of October 8, 1937, with respect to the formation of a new army corps in Libya, I have the honor to submit the following observations regarding this Italian colony.

Practically all of the Embassy's information concerning conditions in the Italian colonies, in none of which is stationed an American consular representative, is derived from press sources in Italy and, to a far lesser degree,

press

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press correspondents, travellers, students and other persons who have visited the Colonies. Since the American Consulate in Tripoli was closed on March 15, 1937, Major Fiske, Assistant Military Attaché, and Captain White, former Assistant Military Attaché for Air, have visited Libya in an official capacity.

There can be no doubt that the strategic importance of Libya is growing daily. It is the culminating link in the axis which starts southward from peninsular Italy through Sicily and the Island of Pantelleria. Paralleling the Mediterranean for 1,822 kilometers on the Libyan coast, the Italian government has built a new highway, 7 meters wide. On the occasion of the Duce's visit to Libya in March, 1937, this road was completed and inaugurated. From a military standpoint, the Military Attaché to the Embassy reports that the new road has made it possible to reduce the number of small garrisons existing heretofore along the coast and to transfer rapidly large bodies of troops toward either the Tunisian or Egyptian border. This Libyan coast road is well served by other roads, more to the south, while other transversal communications between important commercial centers create a road-net fairly favorable to military operations. The Department's attention is here drawn to the attached map of Libya. It will be seen that the new road, which is marked in red pencil, passes through Tobruk, a natural port. This city has already become an entrenched camp, well supplied with water. Its size, strength and organization compares favorably, according to the Military Attaché, with the most perfect post-war defensive bases.

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Reference is made in this connection to the Embassy's

despatch...

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despatch No. 285 of March 24, 1937, regarding the Duce's trip to Libya, in which an extract from an article which appeared in the London DAILY MAIL of March 9 was quoted to the effect that "with the island of Pantelleria fortified and the center of the mined areas between it and Sicily, on the one hand, and it and Tunis, on the other, the passages to the Suez Canal might thereby be narrowed, obliging foreign ships to follow routes along which submarines might operate. An air force having Tripoli and other points along the Libyan coast as far as Bengasi, as bases, might bombard vessels that had loaded mines and submarines."

The Department's attention is also invited to "Comment on Military Attaché's Report No.15869, March 12, 1937;" Reference - The Island of Pantelleria - in which it is stated:

"According to the map, Pantelleria is located 100 km. (62 miles) from Point di Granitola (Torretta) the nearest point in Sicily, and 70 kms. (43 miles) from Kalibia, the nearest point in Tunisia. No ship channel is shown through the Canale di Tunisia between Pantelleria and Tunisia, though it is probable that ships of light draft can make that passage. The main ship channel between Pantelleria and Sicily is to the south of the Graham Banks (Isola Giulia) which are 60 kms. (37 miles) northeast of Pantelleria.

Italian sea coast guns of 305/50 (12") or 381/40 (15") emplaced at Point di Granitola and the nearest point on Pantelleria could probably control the channel between Sicily and Pantelleria. Such guns could also control the greater portion of the Canale di Tunisia but complete control of this

channel, for vessels of light draft, would not be possible unless similar guns were located in the vicinity of Kalibia in Tunisia. If Italy expects to establish definite control over the line of communications between the eastern and western Mediterranean, it may be expected that at a propitious time she will take the eastern portion of Tunisia."

From the above and with reference to the enclosed map, the strategic importance of Libya in the Mediterranean can readily be appreciated. Adverting more specifically to the Department's instruction under reference, and with this background in mind, mention may be made of the decisions arrived at on the occasion of the meeting of the Council of Ministers on April 10, 1937, enumerated in the Embassy's despatch No. 318 of April 14, 1937. One of those decisions contemplated the creation of a new army corps in Libya. When Italian troops recently moved in great numbers from the metropolitan area to Libya, the Italian explanation thereof was that this movement was but a natural consequence of that decision (See Embassy's despatch No. 599<sup>14</sup> of October 8, 1937).

The army corps thus created is known in military circles as the XXth Army Corps. It consisted of three divisions, each composed of two regiments of infantry and battalions of artillery, all motorized. The corps troops consist of one regiment of corps artillery, one regiment of engineers and anti-aircraft units, chemical troops and allied services. The total strength of Italian armed forces in Libya consequent upon the decision of last April was expected to be in the neighborhood of

50,000 men.

The Military Attaché, in reporting this move to his Department in May (Military Attaché's report N.16,024 of May 28, 1937), stated that

"The decision to organize an army corps is a major strategical move. Italy considers herself so strongly protected by her mountainous frontier on the north that any offensive against her in that area is not likely to succeed. For the same reason she would experience the greatest difficulty in attempting to invade France and even if successful there is no strategic objective in the south of France of sufficient importance to bring about a decision if attained. The northern front is closed. The only opportunity for maneuver therefore is in the south.

France looks upon her African colonies as a great source of man power in time of war. The strongest and most important link in the defense of her communications with Africa is the naval base in the land-locked harbor of Biserte. The Biserte-Tunis area is a major strategic objective also because its possession by Italy would strengthen her already strong position across the central Mediterranean.

The distance from Tripoli to Tunis is great and it is not considered likely that an offensive against Tunis from that quarter would succeed, but in any case it would provide a southern front with opportunity for maneuver and with a vital objective and would therefore check the withdrawal

of troops from north Africa to fight in Europe.

That France is apprehensive of the possible threat of an Italian army corps in Libya is indicated by the fact that the garrison in the Tunis area, already very strong, is being increased."

It was understood that the formation of the XXth Army Corps would be completed by September or October of this year. However, it recently became evident that the military establishment in Libya was to comprise two army corps: the XXth and XXIst, of two divisions each, instead of one corps of three divisions. On October 15, 1937, mention was first made in the press of the existence of the latter corps. Troop movements to Libya have been very heavy during the past two weeks and the reasons therefor have been the subject of considerable speculation, if not anxiety, in Paris, London and Cairo. Whatever may be the political motives behind such a move, it is clear that the number of troops stationed in the colony is out of all proportion to police necessities. The Military Attaché estimates that there are already about 50,000 white troops stationed in Libya in addition to about 25,000 native troops, the latter mainly Arabs.

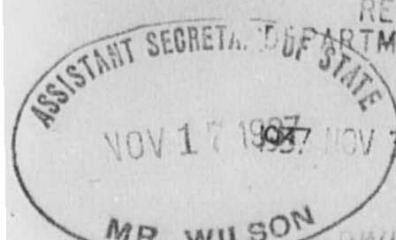
The Military Attaché also states that the improvement of the communications system of Libya and the concentration there of a large force of both ground and air units should be viewed as a shrewd strategic move calculated to forestall any aggressive action against Italy elsewhere by England or France, especially by the latter.

Copies to London,  
Paris and Cairo.

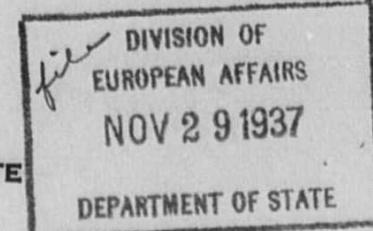
Respectfully yours,

Enclosure: ✓  
Map.  
RGM/wrm 820.

William Phillips.



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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS



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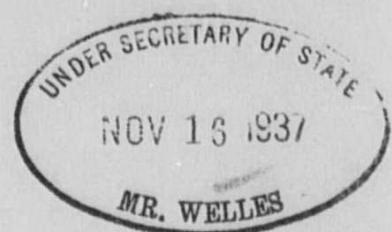
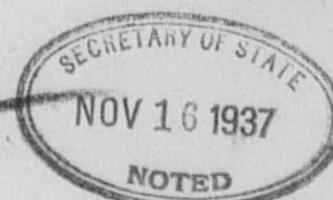
November 12, 1937.

MR. WILSON

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
Mr. Secretary  
AND RECORDS

Mr. Welles:

Mr. Wilson:



The attached despatch from the American Embassy at Rome (No. 624 of October 29, 1937) supplements information previously received in the Department concerning Italian military activities in Libya. It is indicated that the strategic importance of Libya, the culminating link in the axis which starts southward from peninsular Italy through Sicily and the Island of Pantelleria, is growing daily. A new highway, paralleling the Mediterranean for 1,822 kilometers on the Libyan coast and well-served by other roads to the south, has made it possible to reduce the number of small garrisons along the coast and to transfer rapidly large bodies of troops toward either the Tunisian or Egyptian border. The new road passes through Tobruk which has become an entrenched camp and which the Military Attaché compares favorably with the most perfect post-war defensive bases.

The Embassy also calls attention to a report of the Military Attaché concerning the strategic importance of Pantelleria. This island is located 100 kilometers from the nearest point in Sicily and 70 kilometers from the

nearest

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nearest point in Tunisia. With sea coast guns emplaced at strategic points it is indicated that Italy could probably control the channel between Sicily and Pantelleria and also the greater portion of the Canale di Tunisia. The Military Attaché states that "if Italy expects to establish definite control over the line of communications between the eastern and western Mediterranean, it may be expected that at a propitious time she will take the eastern portion of Tunisia".

The decision to organize a new army corps in Libya, referred to in the Division's memorandum of October 25, 1937, is considered to be a move of major strategical importance by the Military Attaché, since it constitutes a threat to France in the Biserte-Tunis area, the most important link in the defense of French communications with Africa, and acts as a check to the withdrawal of French troops from north Africa in the event of hostilities in Europe.

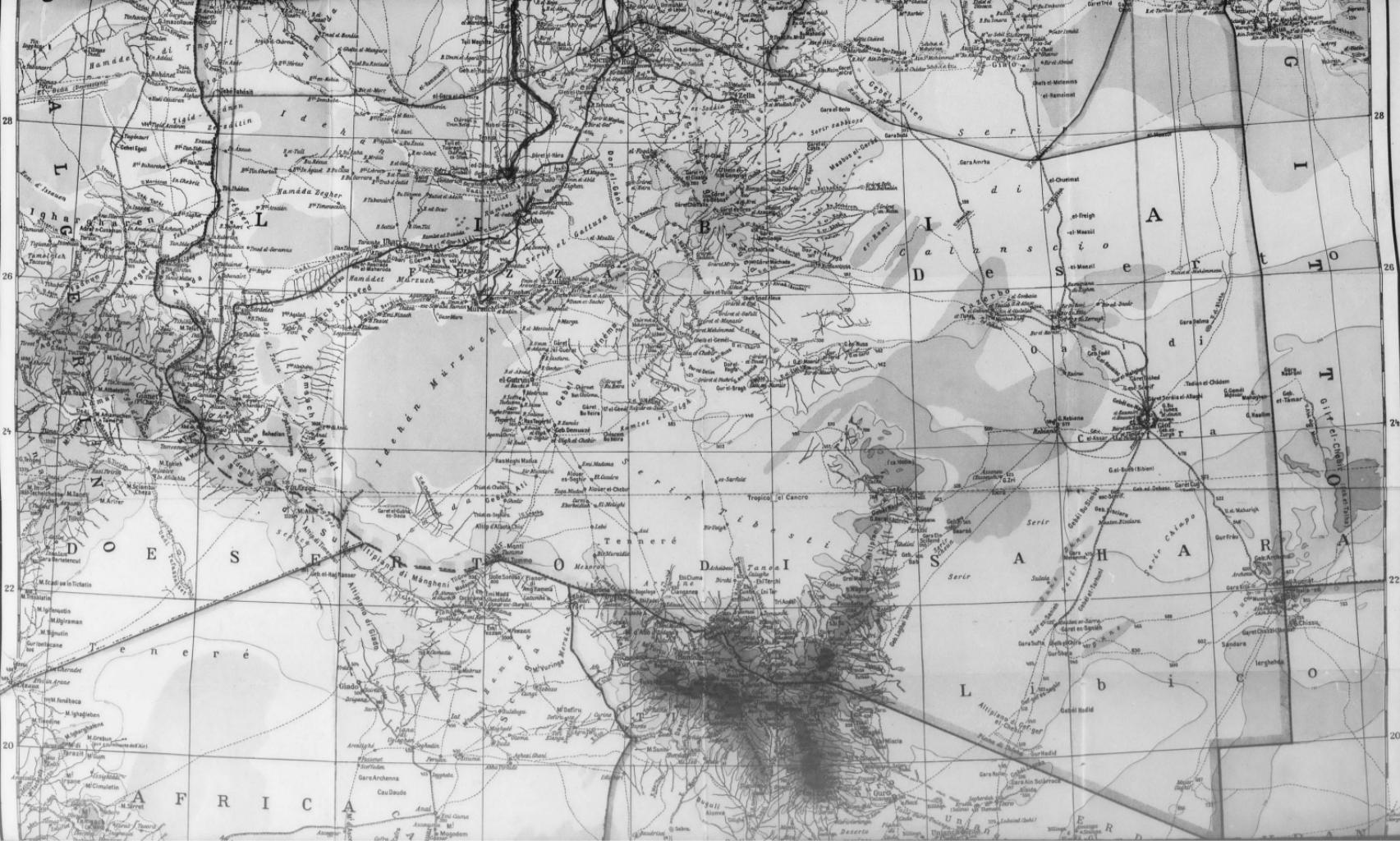
It is indicated that the Italian military establishment in Libya will comprise two army corps of two divisions each instead of one army corps of three divisions. Recent troop movements to Libya are reported to have been heavy and the Military Attaché estimates that there are already about 50,000 white troops stationed in the colony in addition to about 25,000 native troops, the latter mainly Arabs. The Military Attaché also states that the improve-

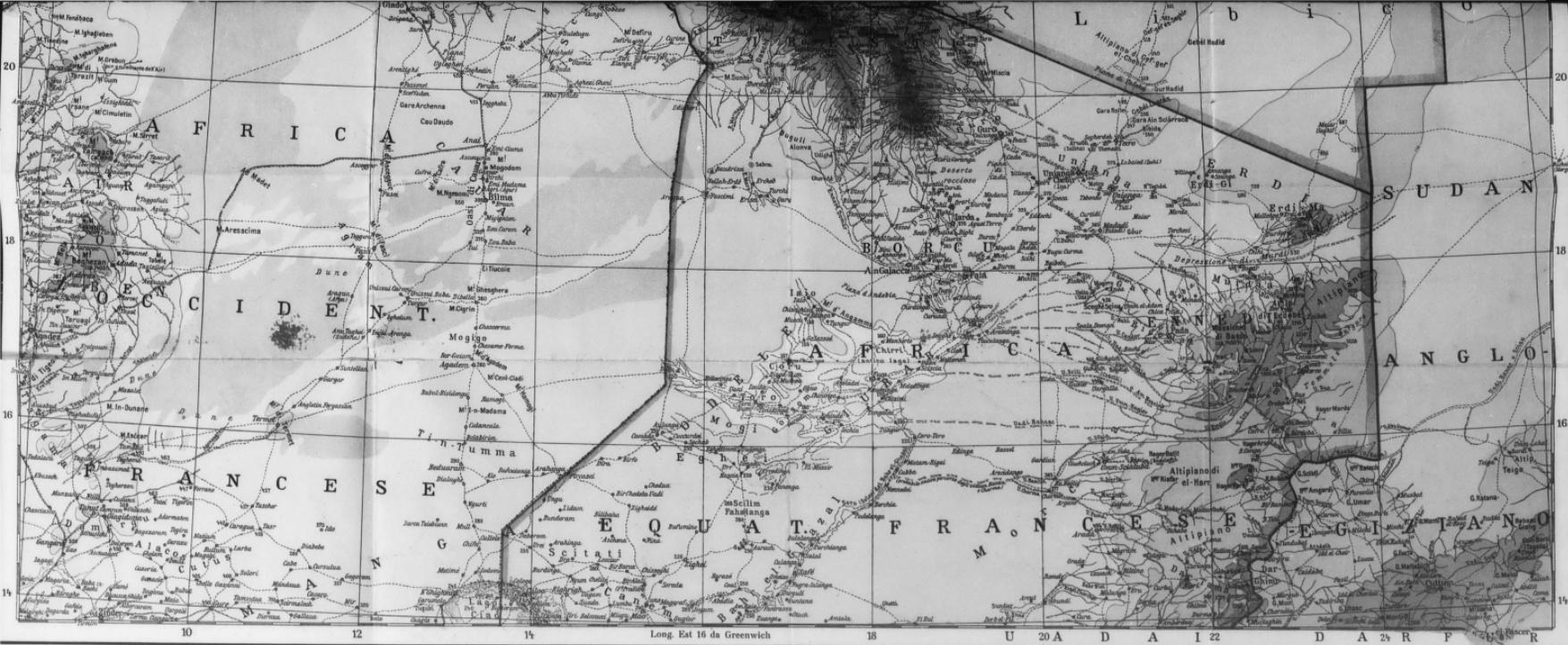
ment of the communication system of Libya and the concentration there of a large force of both ground and air units should be viewed as a shrewd strategic move calculated to forestall any aggressive action against Italy elsewhere by England or France, especially by the latter.

W<sup>m</sup> Wallace Murray

JJD/LS  
gm







A. DARDANO, Direttore del Serv. Cartogr. costr. e red.

Proprietà riservata



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Cairo, October 25, 1937.

1937 NOV 22 PM 1 36

Confidential

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

No. 1104.

Subject: Italian Forces in Libya.



[STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL]

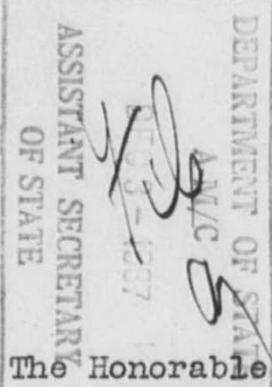
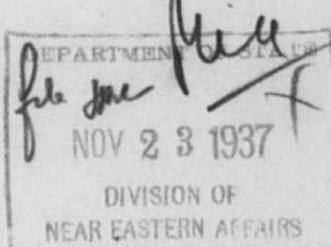
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The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to the Legation's despatch no. 1094 of October 15, 1937, stating that the recent dispatch of large numbers of regular Italian troops to Libya had created considerable uneasiness in Egypt and had caused some intensification of the military preparations in this country.

A high official of the British Military Mission to

Egypt

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Egypt informed me yesterday in confidence that the Mission, while making every preparation within its power to meet the new situation created by the Italian move, realizes the necessity of showing no anxiety which would alarm their Egyptian proteges. The Mission is said to believe that the Italian troops have been dispatched to Libya principally as a bargaining point, to be used in any discussion of the Mediterranean problem, and is inclined to doubt that any immediate action is contemplated by the recent movements.

As regards the military defense of Egypt, the official said that the Mission realizes that Egypt is helpless in the face of an air attack from Libya. The Italians are said to have 300 planes in Libya and to have developed excellent landing facilities. The Mission believes, however, that from the point of view of infantry attack Egypt is still considerably protected by the several hundred miles of desert which separate the inhabited part of the country from any invading army from the west, and that experience in China and Spain has shown that air attacks, while demoralizing and destructive, are ineffective in the actual capture and holding of territory far removed from infantry forces.

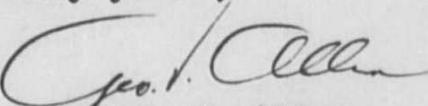
The Military Mission is somewhat fearful lest the morale of the Egyptian populace would break under an air attack. The principal difficulty envisaged is from internal riots directed against the Government and local authorities under the strain of mob hysteria, such as might easily occur among Egyptian civilian populations subjected to bombing. (A civilian air drill, the first

in Egypt, will be held in Cairo on the nights of October 30 and 31, when the lights of the city will be turned out for thirty minutes and sirens sounded).

*740.001/1 Mutual Ag  
Scarno*

It appears to be the opinion of the Military Mission that the key to the Mediterranean situation is held in Berlin. Italian invasion of Tunisia seems most unlikely unless Italy has a clear understanding that Germany will prevent the French Army retaliating in the Piedmont. The Mission is inclined also to doubt that any attack on Egypt will be made so long as the close cooperation between the British and French General Staffs exists, unless Italy should reach a clear understanding with Germany that the French Army will be held stationary in Europe.

Respectfully yours,

  
George V. Allen  
Charge d'Affaires ad interim

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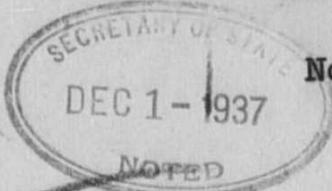
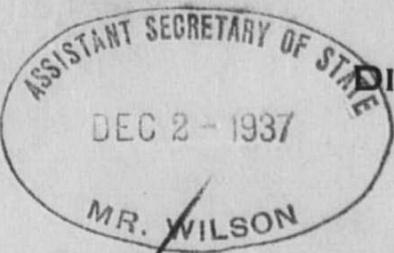
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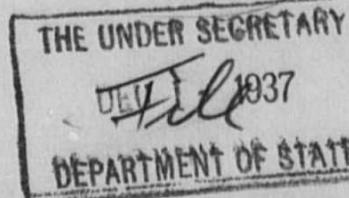
Copy to: Embassy at Rome, together with  
a copy of Despatch no. 1094 of  
October 15, 1937.

## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

## DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS



November 29, 1937.

S -- Mr. Secretary:U -- Mr. Welles.A-W -- Mr. Wilson:

We have received under date of October 25, 1937, from our Chargé d'Affaires in Cairo a further despatch concerning the reenforcement of the Italian garrison in Lybia.

The despatch quotes the confidential statements made to the Chargé d'Affaires by a high official of the British Military Mission to Egypt. According to the latter the Mission, "while making every preparation within its power to meet the new situation created by the Italian move, realizes the necessity of showing no anxiety which would alarm their Egyptian protégés".

The Mission considers the key to the entire Mediterranean situation to lie with Berlin which is a particularly noteworthy point of view in connection with the recent visit of Viscount Halifax to Berlin. The Mission doubts that any attack will be attempted by Italy against either Egypt or Tunis in the absence of an undertaking given by Germany to Italy to hold France in check and so long as the present close cooperation exists between the British and French General Staffs. The opinion that, for the time being, re-

enforcements

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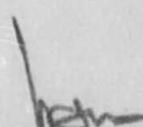
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enforcements are intended for their nuisance value in strengthening Italy's bargaining position, is in confirmation of a similar view reaching the Department from other sources, including London, Rome and our own War Department.

So far as an air attack against Egypt from Lybia is concerned, it is stated as the Mission's opinion that Egypt would be helpless in that respect in consideration of the 300 planes possessed by the Italians in Lybia.

However, it is pointed out that experience in China and Spain has proved that for the capture and holding of territory, aerial operations may only be made effective by the use of infantry. In the use of infantry Egypt, it is added, would be protected by the several hundred miles of desert intervening between Lybia and Alexandria.

The Mission, nevertheless, it is reported, is apprehensive concerning the effect which an Italian air attack might have upon the morale of the Egyptian population. Presumably with a view to building up such a morale, a civilian air drill, the first of its kind in Egypt, was scheduled to be held in Cairo on the nights of October 30th and 31st.

  
Wallace Murray



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Cairo October 29, 1937.  
1937 NOV 26 PM 3:04

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DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

No. 1111



Subject: Italian Military Activity  
in Libya.

[STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL]

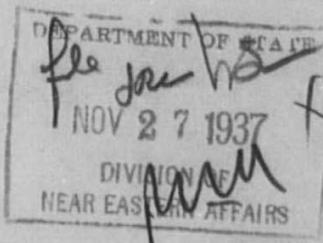
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I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt today of the Department's instruction no. 259 of October 7, 1937, enclosing a copy of an article from the London Daily Herald concerning recent Italian military activity in Libya and requesting the Legation to forward such information as may be obtained discreetly concerning this question.

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N-H

In the Legation's despatch no. 1094 of October 15, 1937, entitled "Egypt and the Mediterranean Situation," and its confidential despatch no. 1104 of October 25, 1937, entitled "Italian Forces in Libya," the activity referred to in the Daily Herald article was discussed.

A high official of the British Royal Air Force in Egypt informed me today that the principal items in the Daily Herald/ article, with which he was familiar, are believed by the British military officials to be true. There appears to be little doubt that Italy has made rapid progress towards converting Libya into a huge military base, although close surveillance of Italian military activity there is admittedly difficult.

The principal military danger to Egypt is considered to be an attack from the air. The Royal Air Force in Egypt, although outnumbered by Italian air personnel and planes in Libya, does not believe that the Italian establishment there is efficient enough to be able to establish an immediate superiority in the air. Reports in the hands of the British authorities are to the effect that the Italian planes are being flown very little, due principally to the high cost of gasoline and maintenance in Libya. British pilots in Egypt are said to average at least two or three times as many hours in the air as the Italians. All of the gasoline and material for flying must be transported to and throughout Libya at great expense, whereas in Egypt fuel is comparatively cheap. There

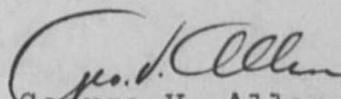
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are oil wells under the joint protection of the British Shell Company and the Egyptian Government, producing a steady supply of fuel here at a reasonable cost, and a refinery at Suez capable of taking care of emergency military needs.

I have been unable to obtain reliable figures concerning the British air establishment or the number of planes in Egypt at the present time. Air squadrons are not infrequently transferred to and from Palestine and Iraq, and the British preparations appear to be made on a basis of the total British air force in the Near East available for an emergency in Egypt.

The question of Italian military activities in Libya is closely related to the subject of Italian propaganda in the Near East, on which a brief report is being made today in the Legation's despatch no. 1112. Further information on this subject will be forwarded to the Department as soon as available.

Respectfully yours,

  
George V. Allen  
Charge d'Affaires ad interim

Copy to  
Embassy at Rome.

In triplicate.  
File no. 710/820  
GVA/hbh

2 Carbon Copies  
Received 7 P.M.



EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

London, November 18, 1937.

No. 3588

SUBJECT: Italian Forces in Libya.

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DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS  
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NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

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The Honorable

The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to transcribe below from Hansard questions in the House of Commons on November 15, and Viscount Cranborne's answers regarding the concentration of Italian troops in Libya:

"Mr. Arthur Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether, in view of the apprehension caused in Egypt by the concentration of large Italian forces on the Egyptian-Libyan frontier, he proposes to make representations to the Italian Government under the terms of the joint declaration of 2nd January, 1937?

"Viscount/

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865C.20/16

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"Viscount Cranborne: No, Sir. I have no reason to suppose that the reinforcement of troops in Libya to which the hon. Member refers is directed against Egypt.

"Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he has any information as to the approximate strength of the Italian forces now stationed in Libya, together with the numbers by which such forces have been increased during the past three months?

"Viscount Cranborne: The normal garrison in Libya, consisting mainly of native troops, is understood to be about 20,000. The Italian Government recently decided to increase this garrison by two Army Corps, and it is understood that up to the present and in the course of the last three months 45,000 to 50,000 troops have been transferred there. So far as His Majesty's Government are aware, the numbers of the native garrison remain unchanged."

Respectfully yours,

For the Ambassador:

*Hugh Millard*  
Hugh Millard  
First Secretary of Embassy.

HM/WJK

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 883.00/985 FOR #1112

FROM Egypt ( Allen ) DATED October 29, 1937  
TO NAME 1-1127 GPO

REGARDING: Italian military activity in Libya.

The massing of 60,000 Italian troops on the border  
of Egypt weighs more heavily in the balance than any  
amount of assurances from Rome or any temporary  
annoyance at Great Britain.

le<sub>c</sub>

865B.20/125

865C.20/117

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 8651/00/21 865c.00/91 FOR #628

FROM Italy (Phillips) DATED Nov. 3, 1937  
TO NAME 1-1127 GPO

(Enclosing report of October 8, 1937 from Mr. Jay Walker, Cairo.)

REGARDING: Military affairs -- Libya.  
Review of number of Italian troops in Libya since 1921.

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It is generally known that there were about thirty-thousand Italian troops held in Libya during the Fezzan campaign of 1921-1925, with a slight increase in numbers for the final military occupation of the interior of Cirenaica in 1929. Up until the beginning of Italy's active military campaign in East Africa in 1935, there is believed to have been no marked increase in the number of armed forces in Libya, but the tension in the Mediterranean thereafter resulted in the Italians increasing their

forces

forces to about seventy-five thousand. The best equipped units were held in the so-called military zone in Cirenaica between Derna and the Egyptian frontier. Later, probably a complete division was returned to Italy but in March 1937, it was known in well informed circles in Tripoli that at least three more divisions from Italy would be added to the Libyan forces. This plan was confirmed in the European press in August 1937.

During 1936, it was noted that there was a decided increase in the number of motorized detachments. These were made up mostly of Italian units although the "Zaptie", native military police force, was also partly motorized. The Italian corps are held principally for service near the coast at the main centres such as Tripoli, Zuara, Garian, Misurata, Bengasi, Barce, Derna, and Tobruch while the greater part of the native Libyans, mounted and camel corps units under European officers are stationed inland at posts such as Nalut, Gadames, Gat, Brach, Murzuch, Hun, Soluch, Giarabub, and Cufra. Due to the lack of water supply and ready transportation facilities during the long hot season, no troops have been held at posts south of a line running across the country from Gat to Cufra. At favorable seasons of the year, the Italian commanders are understood to send detachments on forced marches to visit posts on the extreme southern frontier such as Tummo and Erdi, near the Tebesti hills. The difficulties encountered may be understood by the fact that drinking water supply must be carried from Murzuch to points in the south reported by Marshal Balbo to be as much as a seventeen-day camel trek.

An enormous military construction program has been under way for several years. Troop barracks of a permanent nature have been erected at Tobruch, Derna, Barce, Bengasi, Misurata, and Tripoli to accomodate the increasing numbers of soldiers. At most of the points in the interior, new quarters have been constructed for military police and native troops. Heavy fortifications are visible at every strategical point along the coast and in certain zones on both eastern and western frontiers. In and near the cities of Tripoli and Bengasi, munition and army supply depots cover wide areas. Large new underground gasoline tank reserves were also installed at Tripoli in 1936. The possibilities that, in case of active hostilities, an enemy could blockade the coast and probably cause an almost immediate lack of food supplies to both the civilian and military populations has undoubtedly been responsible recently for the building of four reserve grain elevators in the Tripoli and Bengasi districts. During July 1935, the Governor General issued an order compelling all male Italian civilians in the colony between the ages of 18 and 55 years to be active members of the Fascist Militia. Service in the Militia requires its members to attend military drills in uniform every Saturday afternoon and Sunday, and to be available for active duty in connection with the regular armed forces at any time.

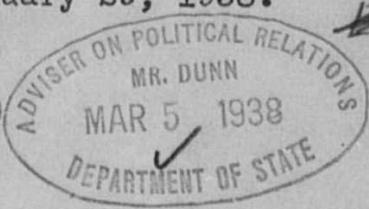


LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

No. 1186

Cairo, January 29, 1938.



Subject: Italian Military Activity in Libya.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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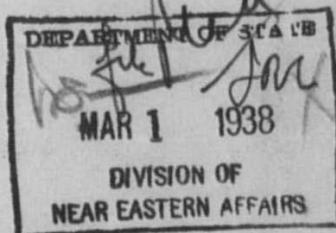
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AND RECORDS

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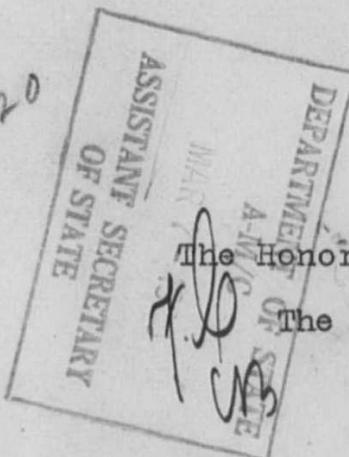
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MAR 8 1938



MAR 14 1938

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The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to enclose herewith a copy  
of a Memorandum from Vice Consul Jay Walker comment-  
ing upon Italian bases in and near Libya for military  
operations.

Respectfully yours,

Joseph B. Morris  
American Charge d'Affaires a.i.

Enclosure:

Confidential

865C.20/19

Enclosure:

1 - Memorandum from Vice  
Consul Jay Walker, dated  
January 28, 1938.

Copy to:

American Embassy, London.

American Embassy, Rome.

American Consulate General, Naples.

In triplicate.  
File no. 820  
LBM/hbh

2 Carbon Copies  
Received 7 P.M.

Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 1186 of  
January 29, 1938, from the Legation at Cairo.

(CORRECT COPY: HBH)

MEMORANDUM  
(Strictly Confidential)

Cairo, January 28, 1938.

865 C.014

The British military officials in Egypt well realize the difficulties they now encounter as a result of the Italo-Egyptian Treaty of December 5, 1925, which added a large strip of territory including the oases of Giarabub, Cufra, and Uweinat to the Italian colony of Libya. After the Turko-Italian War in 1911, the eastern boundary of the Italian colony ran in a southwesterly direction from Sollum until it reached a point known as Tummo. It was not until the tension in the Mediterranean, during the Italo-Abyssinian War, that realization dawned on the British and Egyptians as to the use Italy was preparing to make of these oases - namely, war bases for military operations. A map will show that Giarabub, Cufra, and Uweinat are approximately half way between any points of importance in Libya and Egypt. In fact, the oases of Cufra and Uweinat are more closely connected by caravan routes to Dakhla Oasis in Egypt than with Bengasi in Libya. It is generally admitted that the Italians have a decided military advantage in holding these points as outpost bases.

It is known in certain quarters in Cairo that the Italians are now engaged in completing well equipped military and air bases at the three points noted. Quantities of military stores are being deposited there - suitable for passing motorized columns, and excellent outpost bases are prepared for the air forces. While only a very limited number of troops may be stationed so far south in the interior - due to the unfavorable climate for white troops - it must be remembered that it is only a four day truck drive from Bengasi to Cufra. According to one plan believed possible, an advancing column would undoubtedly start from Cufra towards the oasis of Dakhla in Egypt in an attempt to reach the Nile at a point near Qena.

Well informed circles in Cairo identify the Italian bases in Libya near the Egyptian border,

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from the Mediterranean Sea to the farthest point south, as follows:

Tobruch - well fortified naval base with accommodations for a large number of war vessels. Naval air base. Quarters erected for troops. During 1936, the writer saw some ten thousand troops stationed there. No water. (It must be carried from Derna - about 110 miles.)

El-Aden - about twelve miles south of Tobruch. Newly completed air base, considered by the British to be one of the largest air bases in North Africa. Although only one squadron of planes are permanently stationed at El-Aden, it is known that there are great quantities of air supplies maintained there for an emergency. Planes could fly to this base from points in Italy in about three hours. No water - it must be carried from Derna.

Umm el Hatian - a few miles south of El-Aden. Barracks and equipment for troops, probably for about five thousand. No water - it must be carried from Derna.

In the zone between Tobruch and Bardia, near the Egyptian border there are at present only three small camps of colored Eritrean troops and a few white military police.

Giarabub - very close to the Egyptian border, some two hundred miles from the coast. Known to have an air base of importance and quarters for troops. Water available.

Cufra - known to have an excellent air base and considerable stores for troops. Due to the climate, it is doubtful if white troops could be stationed there any length of time. Plenty of water available.

Uweinat - Air landing field and supplies stored as an air outpost. Limited quantity of water available but a corp of engineers are known to be working at Ain Daua, a few miles distant, in the hope of finding adequate water supply.

As noted in my Memorandum No. 2, dated January 18,

883.248 | 10  
1938, (note: this is the subject of the Legation's despatch no. 1177 of January 18, 1938,) there are only a few Egyptian troops at Sollum on the Egyptian side of the border near the coast, and none held at points in the interior to the south. This situation probably may be accounted for by the absence of water supply near the Egyptian side of the frontier, except at Siwa, and the enormous costs of maintaining Egyptian troops in the border zone which the Egyptian Government is apparently not prepared to undertake.

Jay Walker,  
American Vice Consul,  
Cairo.

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 741.65/509 *Confidential File*

FOR Tel. #69, noon

FROM Italy ( Phillips ) DATED March 20, 1938.

TO

NAME

1--1127

070

REGARDING: Italy is not opposed to reduction of Italian garrisons in Libya.

865C.20/20  
20

**DOCUMENT FILE****NOTE**

**SEE** 865d.01/481 **FOR** #1264

**FROM** Egypt **(** Fish **) DATED** April 18, 1938  
**TO** NAME 1-1127 GPO

**REGARDING:**

Provision in the Anglo-Italian agreements for reduction of the Italian forces in Libya.

Memorandum by Vice Consul Walker commenting on opinion of British military officers in Egypt with respect to -.

865C.20/21

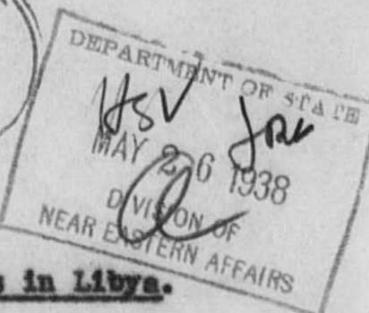
6-4

MAY 10 1938

2022-322

72

WAR DEPARTMENT

Subject : Distribution of Troops.North-African Affairs - Italian troops in Libya.

Reference Report #23,892-W, an officer who handles North African affairs with station in Paris recently made a trip through Morocco and Tunis.

He says that General Noguès, Governor General of Morocco, has matters well in hand and that things have quieted down.

Work is being pushed particularly on the fortifications facing Libya (African Maginot line) and troops have been moved toward the border.

At present, according to him, the Italians have in Libya:

2 Corps, War Strength - 6 Divisions  
1 Mechanized Division,

approximately 100,000 men in all.

Due to the recent Anglo-Italian accord, he expects the Italians to reduce the number of their effectives.

Sumner Waite  
Lt. Colonel, Inf.  
Asst. Military Attaché.

SW/ms.

Source: Personal contact.

Forwarded

H. H. FULLER  
Lt. Colonel, F. A.  
Military Attaché

MAY 27 1938

FILED

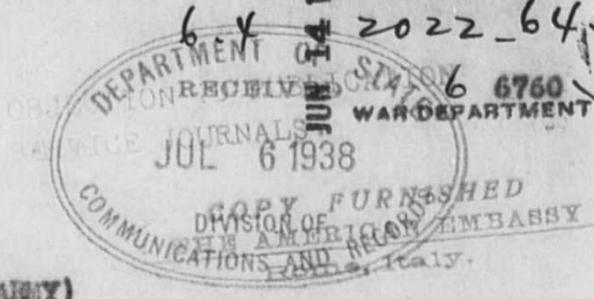
365C.20/22

6-2 Report

OFFICE CHIEF P-4  
MIL., INTEL. DIV.

2861

2022-645-  
6 6760



ITALY (COMBAT - ARMY)

Subject : Maneuvers, Field Exercises, Reviews, Inspections,

Maneuvers in Libya.

It has been reported in the press that the annual maneuvers for the troops in Libya are now being held in the western part of the Territory.

The King and the Undersecretary for War General Pariani left Rome the night of May 19th to attend these exercises. It is stated that on the 24th of May the King will review the troops which have been engaged in the maneuvers, in the plain of Bir el Ghem.

So far as known, no foreign military attachés were invited to attend these exercises.

There have been rumors for some time that maneuvers in Libya were contemplated but no definite information could be obtained on the subject or as to the date on which they were to be held. It is not known whether or not the present date was set to coincide with the Italian-French conversations or whether that is just a coincidence.

Further report on these maneuvers will be made if data becomes available.

G. B. PAYNE,  
Colonel, F.A., U.S.A.,  
Military Attaché.

JUL 6 1938

FILED

365C. 20/23

## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

## DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

RECEIVED

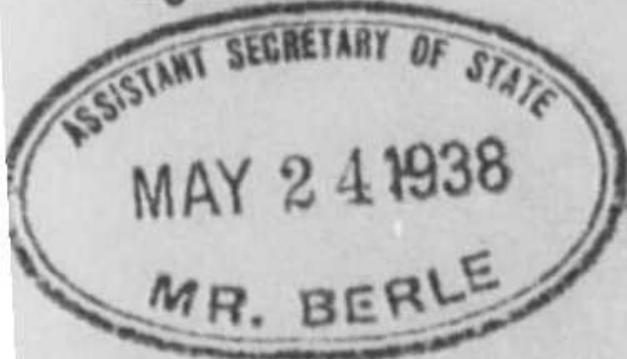
MAY 24 1938

May 21, 1938.

~~A-B~~ Mr. Berle: DIVISION OF  
~~U~~ Mr. Welles: COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORDS

I am attaching another of the memoranda on the major matters of interest in the Anglo-Italian Accord, so far as such subjects fall within the purview of this Division.

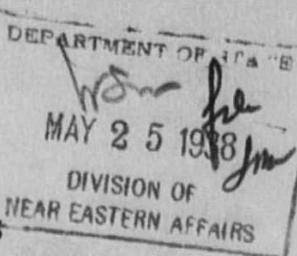
The attached memorandum has to do with the provisions relating to Italian troops in Libya.



*W.M.*  
Wallace Murray

JUL 19 1938

FILED



May 21, 1938.

THE ANGLO-ITALIAN ACCORD OF APRIL 16, 1938 AND LYBIA

In letters exchanged coincident with the conclusion of the Anglo-Italian Accord of April 16, 1938, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the British Ambassador in Rome that the head of the Italian Government had given orders for the diminution of the Italian forces in Lybia.

It was added that:

*q65c.20  
not  
741.65*

"Withdrawals already have begun at the rate of 1,000 a week and will be continued at not less than this rate until Italian Lybian effectives reach peace strength. This will constitute an ultimate diminution of these effectives by not less than half the numbers present in Lybia when our conversations commenced."

The Italian reinforcement of the Lybian garrison began in September 1937 consequent upon a decision, so it was said, which had been taken as long ago as April 10, 1937. The official explanation given by the Italian Government, in view of apprehensions aroused in Egypt, was that "the decision to transfer an Army Corps to Lybia was made by the Council of Ministers last April". It was observed that "It is only for reasons of an international character ... that Italy reinforces and, if necessary, will reinforce later its garrisons in Lybia".

From reports reaching the Department it would appear

that

JUL 19 1938  
FILED

865C.20/24

that it was at first contemplated to send to Lybia an army corps of three divisions. This was modified, however, by the sending of two army corps of two divisions each.

On November 15, 1937, Viscount Craborne stated in reply to a question in the House of Commons that:

"The normal garrison in Lybia, consisting mainly of native troops, is understood to be about 20,000. The Italian Government recently decided to increase this garrison by two Army Corps, and it is understood that up to the present and in the course of the last three months 45,000 to 50,000 troops have been transferred there."

According to this statement Italian troops in Lybia numbered in November 1937 no less than 65,000 to 70,000 or approximately the same number as was maintained there at the height of the Ethiopian crisis. Their reduction by half, as agreed to in the Italian note, would bring them to some 35,000. Their reduction to "peace strength" would bring them to some 20,000 unless it has been decided by the Italian Government to make the peace strength of the forces in Lybia something more than 20,000 in order to more than outnumber the Egyptian Army of 12,000 and British forces of some 10,000. According to a report from our Consulate at Tunis, dated May 6, 1938, French troops in Tunisia number at present some 25,000.

In 1935 tension between Italy and Great Britain over Ethiopia led to the massing of the British Mediterranean Fleet at Alexandria and to the heavy reinforcement of the

Italian garrison in Lybia. The reduction of the latter in 1936 with a view to easing the tension was made contingent upon the reduction, pari passu, of the British Fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean.

A year after the withdrawal of the Italian reinforcements from Lybia they were returned there. There are no assurances in the new accord, nor could there reasonably be, binding Italy not to shuffle them back to Lybia.

How effective they might be in use against either Egypt or Tunis is problematic in the opinion of military experts. In any case, their mobility has been greatly increased with the opening in March 1937 of a motor road extending along the whole extent of the Lybian coast from the Egyptian to the Tunisian frontiers.

So long, of course, as a large Italian force is maintained in Lybia it must necessarily constitute a potential threat of considerable nuisance value to Italian strategic interests. That threat has been effective on two occasions. There is nothing in the new accord which limits Italy's freedom of action to make the threat effective a third time.\*

NE JRC/EG

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\*An Associated Press despatch today (May 21, 1938), following the preparation of this memorandum, reports the massing in Lybia on the Tunisian frontier for maneuvers of two Italian motorized divisions as an Italian answer to the French decision to recruit 60,000 native troops in Tunisia.

November 14 1938.

NE

ED

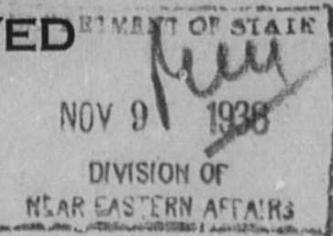
o. War and  
Navy

11/10/38  
TEL/MES/EG

# TELEGRAM RECEIVED

GPO

FROM



JR

This telegram must be closely paraphrased before being communicated to anyone. (B)

ROME

Dated November 8, 1938

REC'd 2:30 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

326, November 8, 7 p.m.



According to reliable information the seventeen transports which took 18,000 Italian colonists to Libya last week are bringing back to Italy 15,000 regulars from the 20th and 21st Army Corps. They will arrive here November 15. This will reduce Italian forces in Libya to practically 40,000 men which is regarded as normal peace strength.

PHILLIPS

KLP:WWC

NOV 16 1938

FILED

865C.20/25

PARAPHRASE OF TELEGRAM NO. 326 FROM ROME,  
NOVEMBER 8, 1938, 7 P.M.

Reliable information has been received that 15,000 regulars from the 20th and 21st Army Corps will arrive in Italy on November 15th, on board the 17 transports which last week took 18,000 Italian colonists to Libya. Italian forces in Libya will thus be reduced to what is regarded as normal peace strength of about 40,000 men.

November 14 1938.

In reply refer to  
NE 865C.20/25

The Secretary of State presents his compliments to the Honorable the Secretary of the Navy and transmits, for the information of the Navy Department a paraphrase of a telegram dated November 8, 1938, from the American Ambassador at Rome communicating certain information regarding movements of Italian troops.

865C.20/25

Enclosure:

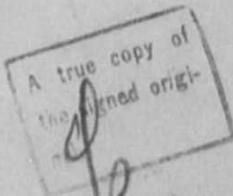
Paraphrase of Telegram  
No. 326, November 8, 1938.

✓  
NOV 14 1938.

NE MBG/EG 11/10

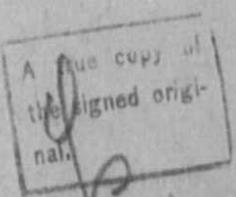
MBG.

865C.20/25  
Encl. VWW  
865C.20/25



PARAPHRASE OF TELEGRAM NO. 326 FROM ROME,  
NOVEMBER 8, 1938, 7 P.M.

Reliable information has been received that 15,000 regulars from the 20th and 21st Army Corps will arrive in Italy on November 15th, on board the 17 transports which last week took 18,000 Italian colonists to Libya. Italian forces in Libya will thus be reduced to what is regarded as normal peace strength of about 40,000 men.



865C.20 /26 ✓ 6

**DOCUMENT FILE****NOTE**SEE 883.20/54 FOR #1435FROM Egypt ( Merriam ) DATED Oct. 26, 1938  
TO NAME 1-1127 \*\*\***REGARDING:** Italian forces in Libya.

Comments of a British intelligence officer on --.

W1

## DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 865d.00/41 FOR #1494

FROM Egypt ( Merriam ) DATED Jan. 6, 1939  
TO NAME 1-1127 \*\*\*

**REGARDING:** Italian forces in Libya.

Encloses memorandum by Vice Consul Walker containing information concerning -.

W1

865C.20 / 27

RCS  
LNE  
EO

# TELEGRAM RECEIVED

REB

This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone. (br)

FROM

CAIRO

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

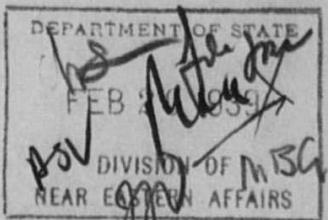
FEB 23 1939

188

Dated February 18, 1939

Rec'd 2:55 p. m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.



18, February 18, 7 p. m. 740.00 / 578 C.F.

My telegram No. 14, February 13, 5 p. m.

A usually reliable source who talked on February 16  
with a British general here informs me that the number of  
Italian troops in Libya exclusive of native soldiers totals  
116,000. British land forces in Egypt do not exceed  
10,000. The British military strongly desire to increase  
their strength here but it is stated that the British  
Foreign Office has adopted the view that the Anglo-  
Egyptian Treaty does not permit an increase at this time  
except at the request of the Egyptian Government. The  
latter apparently does not appreciate the seriousness of  
the position. It is believed that Lord Gort, returned to  
England from Egypt, will take steps to remedy the situation.

*Not  
193.20  
751.65*

FEB 27 1939

FILMED

FISH

NPL

N/C

865C.20/28

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 751.65/543

FOR Tel. 12- 4pm

FROM Tunis ( Heisler ) DATED Feb. 18, 1939  
TO  NAME 1-1127 esp

REGARDING: Unconfirmed reports indicate that the army in this country  
is being placed on a war footing and also that the Italian forces  
on the Libyan-Tunisia border are being reinforced.

fp

865C.20/29

NE  
au

MJD

GRAY

Tunis via Paris

Dated February 18, 1939.

Rec'd. 9 a. m., 19th.

Secretary of State,

Washington.

12, February 18, 4 p. m.

I am officially informed that the movement of troops south continues and that reinforcements are arriving from France and Algeria.

Unconfirmed reports indicate that the army in this country is being placed on a war footing and also that the Italian forces on Libyan-Tunisia border are being reinforced.

HEISLER

RGC  
HTM

SEARCHED

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 740.00/587 FOR Tel. 20-noon

FROM Belgium ( Davies ) DATED Feb. 17, 1939  
TO NAME 1-1127 GPO

REGARDING: German officers and troops embarked for Libya a short time ago via a Mediterranean port.

fp

865C. 20 / 30

## **DOCUMENT FILE**

## **NOTE**

SEE 740.00/588 FOR Tel. 246- 6pm

FROM Great Britain ( Kennedy ) DATED Feb. 17, 1939  
TO NAME 1-1127 GPO

**REGARDING:** Statement of Chamberlain that he had a report about guns being shipped over the Italian border from Germany and the answer he gets is that they are being shipped to Libya.

fp

865 C., 20 / 31

865C.20

865C.20/ 32

## DOCUMENT FILE

### NOTE

SEE 740.00/590 Confidential File FOR Tel#330 8 p.m.

FROM France ( Bullitt ) DATED Feb. 20, 1939  
79/ NAME I-1127 \*\*\*

#### REGARDING:

Comments from Bonnet: Says France has information of Italian reinforcements in Libya and the secret mobilization of Italian reservists and has informed the Italian Military Attaché that full preparations for war being taken by France.

CONFIDENTIAL FILE

865C.20

865C.20/33

## DOCUMENT FILE

### NOTE

SEE 751.65/553 Confidential File FOR Tel#340 midnight

FROM France ( Bullitt ) DATED Feb. 22, 1939  
TO      NAME      1-1127 6 P.M.

#### REGARDING:

Italy reinforcing her army in Libya daily including officers, technicians, and aviators.

CONFIDENTIAL

865C.20

865C.20 / 34

## DOCUMENT FILE

### NOTE

SEE 751.65/565 FOR Tel#14 3 p.m.

FROM Tunis ( Heisler ) DATED Feb. 27, 1939  
797 NAME 1-1127 evo

#### REGARDING:

Thousands of Italian troops arriving in Libya daily and will soon total at least 100,000 in that colony.

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 851a.20/5 FOR #50

FROM Tunis (Heisler) DATED Feb. 17, 1939  
TO NAME 1-1127 \*\*\*

**REGARDING:** German troops now in Libya.

Comments upon the number of -- and the Italian  
troops now stationed in Libya.

865C.20/35

35

lec

Tunis, Tunisia, February 17, 1939.

Military Activities in Tunisia and Libya.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

SIR:

I have the honor to state that reports reaching this Consulate shortly after the beginning of this month indicated a very important movement of army transports in this vicinity, and it was apparent that troops and supplies were passing through this city and proceeding toward the south, presumably for military districts near the Libyan border. Coincident with the reports, troops and transports were observed on the roads leading to the border districts. This gave credence to rumors, then unconfirmed, that the troops in this country were being increased in number, with very heavy reinforcement of the southern garrisons, and especially the garrisons close to the border, where the fortifications were being strengthened.

The movement of troops and further rumors of the passage of two German army divisions through Italy to Libya, created an undercurrent of uneasiness in the country, for it was believed not impossible that German and Italian troops were

preparing

preparing to cooperate in an attack on Tunisia. Hence reports of the strengthening of the garrisons in this country were generally accepted here as a precautionary move on the part of the French military authorities.

The increase in the number of troops in the Protectorate and the strengthening and extension of border fortifications are now established facts, according to information received by the Consulate from a most reliable source, as well as the fortification of vulnerable coast areas to the north of the Libyan border, more particularly along the Gulf of Hammamet where the sea is of sufficient depth to permit naval vessels to come within striking distance. It is also confirmed that the southern section of the country is now heavily mined, to prevent an invasion of Tunisia by forces advancing from Libya to the south of the strongly fortified border. While more detailed information in this connection is not available from official sources, the mined area is understood to be of considerable width and to extend far across the country, sufficient to make unsuccessful any attempted invasion from the south.

Although the present military activities in the Protectorate are presumed to have been brought about by military activities in the neighboring colony of Libya, no official comment in this regard has been obtained by the Consulate from any of the officials of the local government, all of whom are extremely reticent concerning the matter. It is very probably true, however, that the activities are merely precautionary and are considered necessary in view of the

large

large number of Italian troops now stationed in Libya and the presence there of German troops, both together officially estimated here as comprising three complete army corps. No official estimate has been procured locally in regard to the actual number of German troops now in Libya, though their presence there, including a very large number of technical experts, is officially admitted. Unconfirmed reports place the German strength in that colony at two army divisions.

Practically no information is obtainable here from either army officers or government officials to indicate the present strength of the French forces in Tunisia, or the disposition of the various units. Mere rumors place the strength of the French forces at between twenty-five and thirty thousand. The latter figure is probably more nearly correct at this time. Moreover, it is the figure accepted by a responsible officer of the Italian Consulate General in Tunis, who, in a recent conversation, placed the total military strength of the French forces in this country at thirty thousand, including 12,500 on the border between Tunisia and Libya. He asserted, however, that the immediate potential strength of the French is actually much greater, since large numbers of troops can be brought in from Algeria by the route Tebessa-Gafsa-Gabes.

While referring to the military strength of the French in Tunisia, the Italian consular officer took occasion to mention that vessels are arriving continually at the Tunisian ports of Bizerte, Tunis and Gabes laden with tanks, motors

and

"Large number of Italian -4- ships, loaded with supplies and  
war materials, arrive on coast, and are being loaded with oil  
and general ammunition for the French forces, and that  
these shipments are, from the Italian point of view,  
assuming alarming proportions.

When queried in regard to local rumors relating to  
the total strength of military forces in Libya, he admitt-  
ed the presence there of at least 60,000 troops, but claimed  
that supplies of all kinds of military material in Libya  
were far below the French military supplies in Tunisia.  
Unconfirmed local reports give 60,000 troops as the total  
of all military forces in Libya.

Respectfully yours,

Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

Five copies to the Department.  
One copy to the Embassy, Paris, France.  
One copy to the Embassy, Rome, Italy.  
One copy to the American Consulate General, Algiers, Algeria.  
One copy to the American Consulate General, Casablanca, Morocco.

800

CHH.lps

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 751.65/570 FOR Tel. 401- 3pm

FROM France ( Bullitt ) DATED March 3, 1939  
TO NAME 1-1127 676

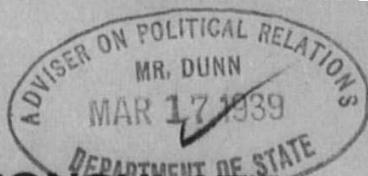
REGARDING: Military affairs- Libya. The Italian Government must reinforce heavily the 62,000 Italian troops now in Libya and must insist that the French should stop sending reinforcements to Tunisia.

fp

865C.20/36

36

NO. 58.

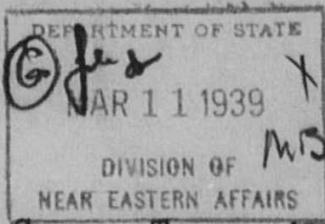


DIVISION OF DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Tunis, Tunisia, February 24, 1939.  
MAR 16 1939 MAR 10 PM 224

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS



SUBJECT: Reports Concerning German Troops in Libya.

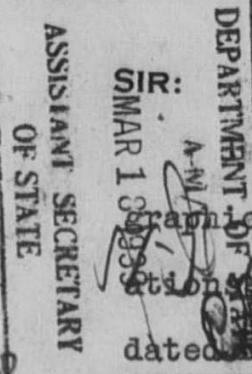
1-1055

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

MAR 20 1939



SIR:  
I have the honor to refer to my despatches and telegraphic reports in regard to rumors and official confirmations of German troops in Libya, and to telegram No. 53 dated February 15, 1939, 6 p.m., sent to the Department by the Embassy in Rome, Italy, concerning such reports.

In view of the telegram from Rome, it would appear that the presence of German troops in Libya, as reported by this Consulate, is not believed substantiated, or at least not a considerable number of troops. Hence it is doubtless of interest to state in this connection that the reports from this office have not attempted to confirm the presence of any certain number of German troops in that colony, though information received by the Consulate from official sources in this city, principally from the Chief of the official Press Bureau in the Residence General, a very reliable source of information, appears to confirm the fact that a number of German troops are

in

MAR 29 1939

FILED

865C.20/37

in Libya at this time. On several occasions the Chief of the Press Bureau has stated that German troops are in Libya, including a large number of technical experts. At the same time he particularly stated that he could give no information to indicate the total number of German troops actually in the colony. All references in reports from the Consulate in regard to the possible number of German troops there, such as two army divisions, were cited as unconfirmed rumors.

It is still impossible to procure any information from a reliable source in this country to indicate the actual number of German troops in Libya, or whether the total number is large or comparatively small. Persistent local rumors are to the effect that German troops from the Brenner Pass were sent through Italy to Libya and now comprise two complete army divisions, although it is not necessarily intimated that the troops were sent to Libya at the same time. Whether or not there are any considerable number of German troops in the colony, it is to be noted that practically all private sources of information in Tunis, both Arab and French, are convinced of the truth of the rumors. On the other hand, official sources of information merely confirm the presence of an undetermined number of German troops.

Very respectfully yours  
*Charles H. Heisler*,  
Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

CHH:chh.

800

Five copies to the Department  
One copy to American Embassy, Paris.  
One copy to American Embassy, Rome.  
One copy to American Consulate General, Algiers.  
One copy to American Consulate General, Casablanca.

NO. 62

RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

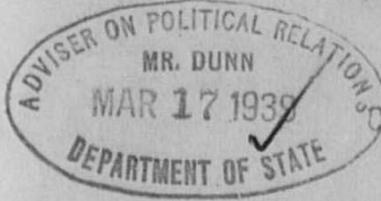
AMERICAN CONSULATE



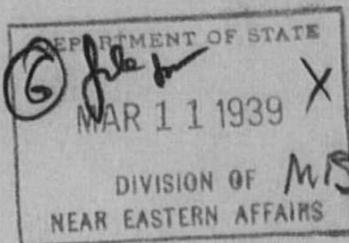
AE  
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1939 MAR 10 AM 11 49

Tunis, Tunisia, March 1, 1939.



DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS



SUBJECT: Reports Concerning German Troops in Libya.  
1-1055 GPO

FOR DISTRIBUTION & CHECK Yes   
To the Field   
In

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

SIR:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch No. 58 dated February 24, 1939, relative to reports concerning the presence of German troops in Libya, and to state that further efforts are being made to obtain the opinions of various officials in Tunis in regard to the actual number of German troops in that colony. Few officials care to discuss the matter, however, and it is difficult to procure information of real value at this time.

The rumors in regard to two German divisions in Libya still persist, though the source of these rumors can not be determined. In an effort to verify the rumors, the subject was discussed at some length with the Chief of the Information Service of the Residence General, Tunis, who would not admit of any particular number of German troops in Libya, although he insisted that German troops were there and included a large number of technical experts. When pressed for further information,

he stated

HR 89 1839  
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865C.20/38

he stated that he was not permitted to give additional details.

In a recent conversation with the Chief of the Civil Cabinet of the Residence General, it was learned that he did not believe any considerable number of German troops had been sent to Libya, and he thought the German Government had little intention of despatching troops to that colony. He was positive, however, that German army officers, mostly instructors, were in Libya, but not an exceptionally large number of them. While he considered it possible that some troops were there, he expressed the opinion that they could not be there in important numbers, certainly not to the extent of one or two divisions.

No expression of opinion has been obtained from army officers in this city, all of whom avoid discussions of military matters. Just now, moreover, most of the army officers personally known to the Consulate have been transferred to the south.

Very respectfully yours,

*Charles H. Heisler*

Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

In quintuplicate to the Department.  
One copy to The Embassy, Paris.  
One copy to The Embassy, Rome.  
One copy to Consulate General, Algiers.  
One copy to Consulate General, Casablanca.

800

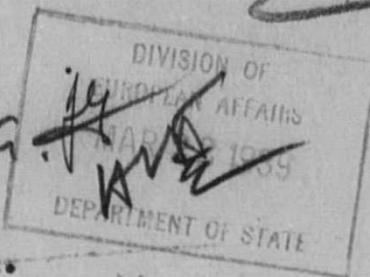
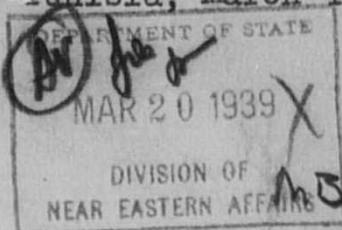
CHH:jhd.

NO. 66

RECORDED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
**AMERICAN CONSULATE**

1939 MAR 20 AM 11<sup>48</sup> Tunis, Tunisia, March 4, 1939.

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS



SUBJECT: Reports of German Troops in Libya.

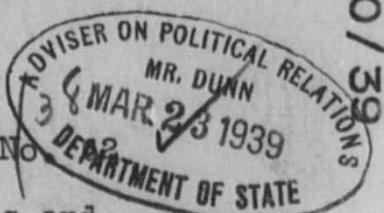
1-1055

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

MAR 24 1939



SIR:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch No. 1055 dated March 1, 1939, and to previous despatches and telegrams relative to reports concerning the presence of German troops in Libya. As of possible interest to the Department in connection with such reports, there is quoted below a translation of an article which appeared in LE PETIT MATIN, Tunis, March 4, 1939, giving information received by the newspaper from London.

"Whitehall Apparently Informed of German Troop Movements.

"London, March 3. According to certain reports, it is expected within a few days that Lord Perth will make a fresh call to formulate in more forcible terms than previously, the surprise and regret of Great Britain at the further despatching of Italian troops to Libya.

"Disquieting reports have apparently reached Whitehall particularly regarding movements of German troops to Libya, as well as the sending of equipment and colonial uniforms. At the House of Commons yesterday afternoon during question time, Mr. Mander asked whether the Government was informed of the despatching of German troops and equipment to Libya. Mr. Butler replied that he was not unaware of

ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
OF STATE

MAR 23 1939

A-M/6

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

MAR 29 1939

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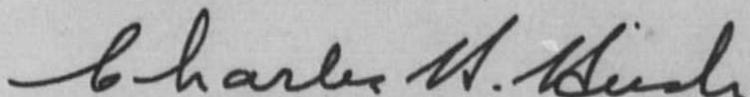
certain

865C.20/39

certain movements to Libya, but that to his knowledge no German detachment had been sent there. The reply was perhaps not very satisfactory. It is not a reply to dispel disquiet, especially when it is known that Mr. Bastianini, in the absence of Mr. Ciano, advised Lord Perth of a further despatching of 30,000 men to Libya, due to the possibility of a rapid concentration of French forces, concentration made easy by the facility of French communications with Africa. Communication made by Lord Perth to the British Government will probably be the object of the deliberations of the Cabinet tomorrow.

"Lastly, the news that reached London from Italian sources is confirmed: Field Marshall Goering, during his visit to Italy, is to go to Libya. This also shows Germany's interest in the question."

Respectfully yours,



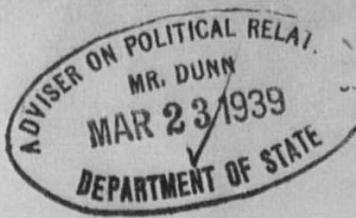
Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

Five copies to the Department  
One copy to Embassy, Paris.  
One copy to Embassy, Rome.  
One copy to Consulate General, Algiers.  
One copy to Consulate General, Casablanca.

800

CHH:jhd.

NO. 65.

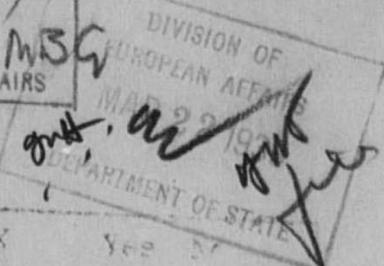
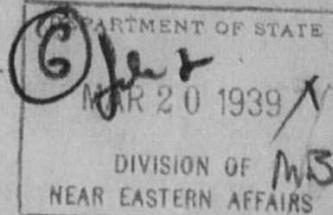


AMERICAN CONSULATE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Tunis, Tunisia, March 4, 1939.

1939 MAR 20 AM 11 48

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS



SUBJECT: Troops in Libya and Tunisia.

1-1055

FOR DISTRIBUTION - CHECK

To the File

MID. & O.M.

WASHINGON

MAR 24 1939

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

MAR 24 1939  
SIR  
A-M/C  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
OF STATE

I have the honor to report that the Chief of the Civil Cabinet of the Residence General, Tunis, recently informed me that the troops in Libya were being reinforced at the rate of several thousand a day, and he expected the number of Italian troops in that colony to reach at least 100,000 in a very short time, possibly during the early days of this month. He could express no opinion in regard to the total number of troops Italy expected to send to Libya.

With reference to Tunisia, the Chief of the Civil Cabinet stated that troops in this country totalled 35,000, and he denied the truth of local rumors which place the total of French forces now in Tunisia at nearly 100,000. It is to be noted, however, that reports from many unofficial sources give the present strength of French forces in the country at far more

than

MAR 29 1939

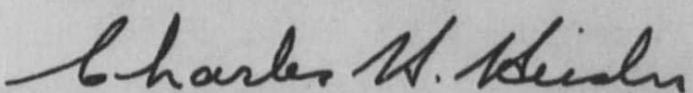
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865C.20/40

than 35,000. The most reliable unofficial reports indicate a possible strength of close to 100,000.

The Chief of the Civil Cabinet did not believe in the immediate possibility of an attack against Tunisia, though the military authorities in Tunisia were taking measures to prevent anything in the nature of a surprise attack. Hence the increase in the number of troops in the country, he said, a necessary precautionary measure, since France had no intention of attacking Libya. Most people in Tunis believe this to be the actual situation, and are convinced that the increase in the number of troops and the strengthening of the fortifications are to discourage any direct action from the Libyan side of the border. However, it is perhaps of interest to mention in this connection that local rumors, unconfirmed of course, credit France with the intention of moving the troops in Tunisia against Libya in case the Italians attack Jibuti.

Respectfully yours,



Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

Five copies to the Department.  
One copy to Embassy, Paris.  
One copy to Embassy, Rome.  
One copy to Consulate General, Algiers.  
One copy to Consulate General, Casablanca.

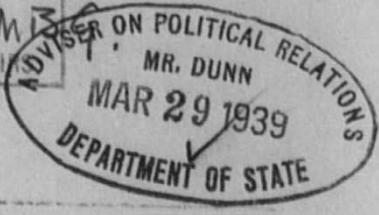
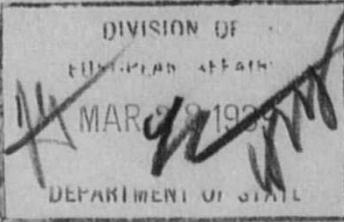
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CHH:jhd.

NO. 71.

AMERICAN CONSULATE

Tunis, Tunisia, March 7, 1939.



RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
MARCH 21 PM 3 10

SUBJECT: DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

Reports of German Troops in Libya.

FOR DISTRIBUTION - CHECK Yes No

TO THE PAPER [ ]

HONORABLE  
THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON  
SIR:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch No. 66 of March 4, 1939, and to previous despatches and telegrams concerning reports of the presence of German troops in Libya, and to quote, as of possible interest to the Department in connection with such reports, the following extract from LE PETIT MATIN, Tunis, of March 5, 1939, which it is asserted appeared in the French newspaper AUX ECOUTES:

"While, they write, Italy is pursuing in the interior of Tunisia its work of undermining, serious forces are preparing for a thrust toward the exterior. We are the first to announce, in the French press, that a regiment of German infantry Klangenfurth (ex-Austria) has just arrived in Libya and is stationed near the Tunisian frontier. Moreover, these men are dressed in colonial uniform as it is called, which is an exact copy of the Italian uniform."

In giving the above paragraph from the French newspaper, LE PETIT MATIN preceded it with the statement that M. Bonnet, of France, estimated the number of Italian soldiers in Libya to be nearly

APR 3 - 1939

FILED

98,000, exclusive of certain German troops.

The information in regard to German troops in Libya coincides, to a certain extent, with the information received by this Consulate from the Chief of the Information Service of the Residence General, Tunis, who asserted that there were German troops in Libya, including a large number of technical experts. Moreover, in a recent conversation he mentioned reports to the effect that some of the German troops were dressed in Italian uniforms. From the article taken from the French newspaper, it would appear possible that the uniforms are German colonial uniforms, similar to the Italian uniforms in Libya.

Respectfully yours,

*Charles H. Heisler*

Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

Five copies to the Department.  
One copy to Embassy, Paris.  
One copy to Embassy, Rome.  
One copy to Consulate General, Algiers.  
One copy to Consulate General, Casablanca.

800

CHH:jhd.

765C.20

365C.20/ 42

## DOCUMENT FILE

### NOTE

SEE 751.65/585 FOR #2206

FROM Great Britain ( Johnson ) DATED Mar. 2, 1939  
/TQ/ NAME 1-1127 . . .

#### REGARDING:

Increased Italian troops in Libya. Official statement made in the House of Commons on February 27th in reply to questions regarding -.



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Cairo, March 25, 1939.

Strictly Confidential

No. 1586.



Subject: Memorandum by Vice Consul Jay Walker on the  
Situation in the Near East, North Africa  
and Ethiopia.



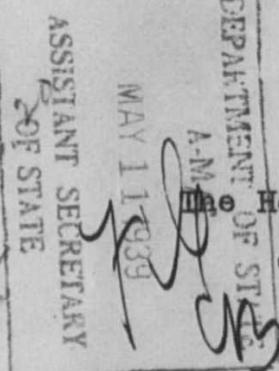
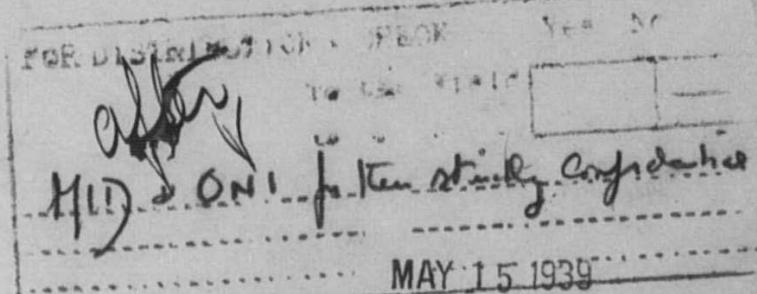
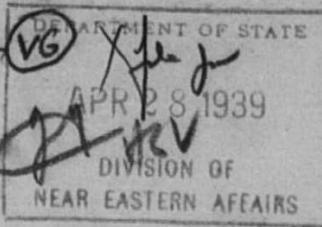
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P.3-4

RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

1939 APR 27 PM 12 01

seen:  
forwarded.  
6/12/39.

V.C. to  
of Consulate



Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of a strictly confidential memorandum dated March 24, 1939, prepared by Vice Consul Jay Walker, relative to the situation in the Near East, North Africa, and Ethiopia with particular reference to German technicians attached

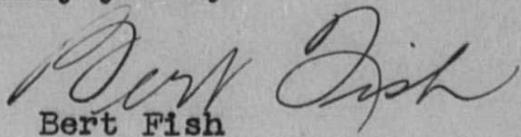
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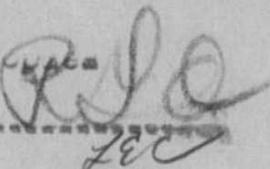
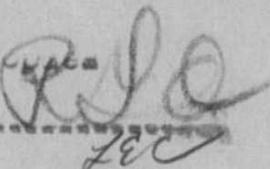
to the Italian forces in Libya, and a reported increase of Italian influence in Palace circles in Egypt, and German and Italian propaganda in Egypt.

Respectfully yours,

  
Bert Fish

✓  
Enclosure:

1 - Memorandum dated March 24, 1939,  
prepared by Jay Walker, Vice  
Consul at Cairo.

  
Received 

In triplicate.  
file no. 820.02  
BF/icg

Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 1586 of March 25,  
1939, from the American Legation at Cairo.

(Correct Copy - ICG)

No. 19.

MEMORANDUM

(Strictly Confidential)

March 24, 1939.

Libya.

British Air Intelligence reports indicate that there are, at present, about 250 German military technical experts in Libya; also that there has been an unusually large number of German staff officers visiting the country within the past few weeks. The British military give great importance to the assignment of such a large number of German experts to Libya as they realize that their work must be of a purely supervisory nature. It is known that the experts are stationed in areas near the Egyptian border as well as near the Tunisian frontier. British officers returning from recent maneuvers in the Western desert of Egypt report a heavy concentration of Italian forces along the Egyptian border. The British Air Intelligence state that their latest reports indicate some 110,000 troops in Libya, including metropolitan and native forces as well as the military police units.

Air Forces.

According to the British Air Intelligence, it is expected that there will be a complete replacement of all their bombing planes in Egypt. The replacements will be six squadrons of twelve each of "Blenheims" bombers, with a carrying range of 900 miles and a speed of about 240 miles per hour. In addition, there are three fighting squadrons of 18 planes each, and a bomber transport squadron. There is also a mixed squadron stationed at Khartoum, Sudan, of 21 planes.

Total  
(Egypt and the Sudan)

Bombers . . . . .	72
Fighters . . . . .	54
Mixed squadrons . . . . .	21
	147 planes

(Number of planes in bomber transport squadron not given).

In

In case of an emergency in Egypt, the British plan to call the following reserves:

3 squadrons from Palestine	36
3 squadrons from Iraq	36
1 squadron from Kenya	12
1 squadron from Aden	12
	<u>96</u>
	planes.

It is understood that the British have plans underway to make the Near East air command one of the most important in their services and, within six months, intend to have at least five times as many fighting planes in service in this area as at present.

East Africa.

The British services report that there is a complete stalemate in the general situation in Abyssinia. Reports indicate no marked change in the number of Italian armed forces held there in the past four months. The expected attempt of the Italians to recapture outlying zones during the present dry season has not materialized, to-date. The British note also that recent Italian press reports fail to give further publicity to various schemes for colonization and agricultural projects. This situation, the British believe, is probably due to the known unsettled state of the country and a recently alleged Italian view that Italy's future in Abyssinia lies in its military possibilities. The roads being built in that country are strategic, and not designed to serve production. The large military and air forces maintained there remain a menace to the smaller forces in British and French controlled territories adjoining. British reports indicate that the Italian military supplies in Abyssinia are at a very low point. This situation is particularly noticeable in the case of gasoline and motor oil supplies.

According to local official reports, the British have apparently been inducing the French to re-occupy the island of Dumeira, in the Straits of Bab el Mandeb at the southern entrance to the Red Sea. It will be recalled that this strategic island, lying close to the British island of Perim, was to be turned over to the Italians -- together with a small zone of French Somaliland -- by the so-called Franco-Italian Accord of January 1935. This Accord was never ratified, and was renounced by Italy several months ago. Press reports have announced that France recently re-occupied the small territory on the mainland, but not the island of Dumeira. The unique position of Dumeira explains the British interest in the island and their reasons for wishing it returned to France rather than held and fortified by the Italians, where it could be a direct menace to British and French shipping channels.

Reference was made in my last memorandum to the

disagreeable

disagreeable situation which had arisen between the Italians and the British-Egyptian authorities relative to unauthorized flights by Italian planes from points in southern Libya across the Sudan to East Africa. Recently, it seems the Italians asked permission to fly two squadrons of six bombing planes each from a point near Tobruch in Libya to Cairo and thence down the Nile route to Abyssinia. The British, after considerable deliberation, granted the permission providing the planes did not fly over prohibited areas. It appears, however, that the first Italian squadron deliberately flew over Mersa Matruh in the prohibited zone and later, when the squadron landed at Cairo, the planes were thoroughly searched on British military orders and all cameras etc. were confiscated. The disagreeable incident which followed resulted in a cancellation of the permit for the second Italian squadron to make the flight. Local British authorities report that the recent approval given to Bruno Mussolini to fly across Egypt and the Sudan to Abyssinia was first refused by the local authorities but finally approved only on intervention in the matter from the British Foreign Office at London. My informant advises me that the local authorities have definitely decided to refuse Italian requests to fly over prohibited areas in Egypt and the Sudan. All Italian flights must hereafter follow the Nile route to and from Abyssinia.

Palace.

The British services are concerned regarding the political life of the present Egyptian cabinet. According to their opinion, it is expected that within a few weeks Ali Maher, or someone close to him in political life, will endeavor to form a cabinet which will be some sort of a Palace dictatorship. Such a step, the British believe, will be a detriment to their interests in this country, as they foresee Italian influence at the Palace taking a greater hand in attempting to have Egypt evade the terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.

The British are puzzled to find that a number of their intelligence operators have recently been arrested by members of the Egyptian special services. In each case, key men have been detained and important documents of special value to the Italians have been confiscated. The delicate situation which has arisen over the matter leaves the British to understand that they may not depend on loyalty and cooperation from certain Egyptian officials.

Propaganda.

Attention is invited to the note in my previous memorandum regarding the extended activities of German propaganda in Egypt. Within the past two weeks, the British

Air Intelligence gave me a copy of a mimeographed circular entitled "A voice out of the American opposition" (copy attached) received by a British staff officer at Cairo, together with copies of recent speeches by Herr Hitler, in a plain envelope posted to him from Germany. The writer has also been informed that a number of British military and civilian officials in Egypt have received similar circulars posted to them from points in Germany. The British assume that this is merely a part of a direct mail program directed from Nazi sources in Germany with the assistance of their agents in this country, who undoubtedly furnish the names and addresses. With further regard to this type of so-called propaganda, the writer has recently seen other circulars directed against the President of the United States being passed from hand to hand by prominent members of the Italian Fascist party at luncheons at a well known international club in Cairo.

*811.001 Rovine F.D.  
7/11-62*

JAY WALKER

Enclosure.

A voice out of the American opposition.

R E J E C T E D.

A stranger stood at the gates of Hell  
And the devil himself answered the bell.  
He looked him over from head to toe  
And said, "My friend, I'd like to know  
What have you done in the line of sin  
To entitle you to come within?"  
Then Franklin D. with his usual guile,  
Stepped forth and flashed his toothy smile.  
"When I took charge in thirty-three  
A nation's faith was mine" said he.  
"I promised this and I promised that  
And I calmed them down with a fireside chat.  
I spent their money on fishing trips  
And I fished from the decks of their battleships -  
I gave them jobs on the P.W.A.  
Then raised their taxes and took their pay  
I raised their wages and closed their shops.  
I killed little pigs and burned their crops.  
I double crossed both old and young  
And still the fools my praises sung.  
I brought back beer and what do you think?  
I taxed it so high that they couldn't drink.  
I furnished money with Government loans.  
When they (sic) a payment I took their homes.  
When I wanted to punish the fools, you know,  
I'd put my wife on the radio.  
I paid them to let their farms lie still  
And imported food-stuffs from Brazil.  
I curtailed crops when I felt real mean  
And shipped in corn from Argentine.  
When they start to worry and fret  
I get them chanting the alphabet  
With A.A.A. and N.L.B.  
The W.P.C. and the C.C.C.  
With these many units I get their goats  
And still I crammed it down their throats -  
My workers worked with the speed of snails  
While the taxpayers chewed their fingernails.  
When the organizers needed dough  
I closed up the plants for the C.I.O.  
And I put the screws on the rich man's wealth  
And heckled the poor till I robbed their health.  
Then some who couldn't stand the gaff  
Would call on me, and how I'd laugh.  
When they got too strong on certain things  
I'd pack and head for old Warm Springs.  
I ruined their countries, their homes, and then  
I placed the blame on "Nine Old Men".  
And the devil stood and his head he bowed  
At last he said "Lets make it clear,  
You'll have to move. You can't stay here  
For once you mingle with this mob  
I'll have to hunt myself a job."



AE  
HPC  
HSV

## DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

Mr. Burkh  
U - Mr. Welles

S - Mr. Secretary

UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

MAY 1 - 1939

April 29 1939.

SECRETARY OF STATE

MAY - 3 1939

NOTED

### CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION IN THE NEAR EAST AS VIEWED BY BRITISH AIR INTELLIGENCE

The following is a summary of certain confidential information given one of our officers in Cairo by British Air Intelligence:

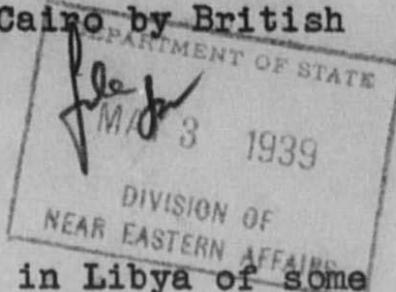
#### Libya

Latest reports indicate the presence in Libya of some 110,000 Italian troops in that country, of whom a large number are concentrated along the Egyptian border.

There would appear to be about 250 German military technicians in Libya, while a large number of German staff officers are reported to have visited there during recent weeks.

#### Egypt

The British are rapidly strengthening their air forces in Egypt and expect to make the Middle East air command in Cairo one of the most important in their service. The present strength consists of more than 147 planes and it is planned to use British planes in Palestine, Iraq, Kenya and Aden as an emergency reserve. These number, at present,

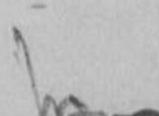


96 but the whole number of fighting planes in the Middle East is expected to be increased five-fold within six months.

Further evidence of German propaganda in Egypt is reported, including the dissemination from Germany by mail to individuals in Egypt of scurrilous attacks upon President Roosevelt. An example is given in the enclosure to the attached memorandum.

East Africa

The situation in Ethiopia is described as "a complete stalemate" and it is suggested that Italy has abandoned its colonization and agricultural aims in that country and is placing principal emphasis upon the military and strategic possibilities of Ethiopia. It is added that the "large military and air forces maintained there remain a menace to the smaller forces in British and French controlled territories adjoining".

  
Wallace Murray

# TELEGRAM RECEIVED



EDA

This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased  
before being communi-  
cated to anyone (BR)

CAIRO (PART AIR)  
FROM

DATED April 27, 1939 JN IT

RECEIVED 5:45 a.m. May 1st

Secretary of State

Washington

45, April 27, 4 p.m.



Paraphrase  
to ONI + MID  
5/2/39  
GRCLUS

British confidential reports indicate German  
activities in Libya recently such as non-stop air flights  
to Tripoli from Germany. The Germans have full staffs  
of officers and mechanical experts stationed at strate-  
gic points in Libya. Equipment and munitions taken  
from Czechoslovakia are arriving in quantities. Italian  
land forces in Libya now number about 60,000 whites and  
50,000 natives. Recently twenty Italian CR 32 bombing  
planes took up stations at the air base near Tobruk.  
Estimated number of British military planes stationed  
in the Near East available for the defence of Egypt:  
184 bombers and 117 fighters. A recent lengthy confi-  
dential report of the chief of the British military  
mission in Egypt says in effect that the Egyptian army  
as a fighting unit at this time is of very little value.

Detailed report by pouch.

FISH

RR

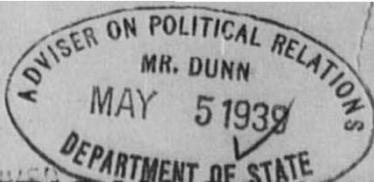
365C.20/44

MAY 4 1939

WIRE

N/C

NO. 120



AMERICAN CONSULATE  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

1939 MAY 2 PM 3.03 Tunis, Tunisia, April 20, 1939.

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
MAY 1939  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
jew C  
MAY 3 1939  
DIVISION OF  
NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: Army Command Posts in Libya being Transferred  
from Tunisian Border to Egyptian Border.  
1-1055

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

FOR DISCUSSION - INFO

COPY TRANSMITTED BY THE  
Commercial Office (A-M/U)

To the White House

Levitt

WASHINGTON MAY 6 1939

5/6/39

SIR:

I have the honor to report that the Consulate has learned from very reliable and confidential sources that General Blanc, Commanding General in Tunisia, has received information of the transfer of a large number of Italian Army Command Posts in Libya from the Tunisian border to the Egyptian frontier. The Consulate is given to understand that General Blanc considers this information of great importance at this time.

No additional information in regard to the transfer of "command posts" has been procured by the Consulate.

Respectfully yours,

*Charles H. Heisler*  
Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

800 X  
CHH:jhd.

Five copies to the Department,  
One copy to The Embassy, Paris,  
One copy to The Embassy, Rome,  
One copy to The Legation, Tangier,  
One copy to Consulate General, Algiers,  
One copy to Consulate General, Casablanca.

865C.20/45



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE 1939.

Strictly Confidential

1939 MAY 24 PM 1 33

No. 1621.

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

Subject: Military Situation in the Near East as  
Reported by Vice Consul Jay Walker.

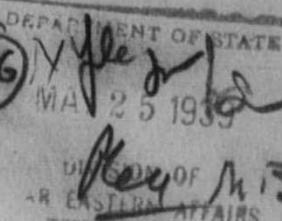
FOR DISTRIBUTION - CHECK Yes No

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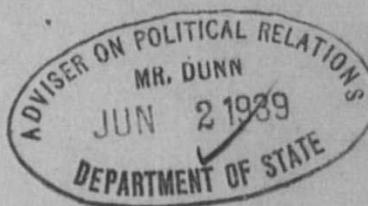
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--- JUN 6 1939 ---

POL EM



to  
Vice Consul Walker



**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
JUL 8 1939  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to my telegram no. 45 of April 27, 4 p. m., 1939, and to transmit herewith a copy of a strictly confidential memorandum, dated April 26, 1939, concerning the military situation in the Near East, with particular reference to Libya and Egypt, which has been prepared by Mr. Jay Walker, Vice Consul at Cairo.

In

ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
OF STATE

JUN 5 1939  
883-10A

JUL 10 1939

FILED

865C.20/46

NM

In this connection I wish to add that Mr. Walker showed me the carbon copies of the original documents from which a portion of the information contained in the enclosed memorandum was obtained.

Respectfully yours,

*Bert Fish*  
Bert Fish

2 Carbon Copies

*KHC*

Enclosure:

1 - Copy of Memorandum, dated  
April 26, 1939, prepared  
by Vice Consul Jay Walker.

In triplicate.  
file no. 820.02  
BF/icg

Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 1621 of April 27,  
1939, from the American Legation at Cairo.

(Correct Copy - ICG)

No. 20.

MEMORANDUM

(Strictly Confidential)

April 26, 1939.

Cooperation:

The British Air Intelligence reports that there has now been a full liaison established between themselves and the French Intelligence Services in Egypt. This co-operation is reported to be the first which has existed between the intelligence services of those two countries in Egypt since shortly after the World War. My information is that these Services are now checking their lists of names of German and Italian residents here, of key men in the several local Nazi and Fascist organizations who will immediately be apprehended should hostilities break out in this part of the Mediterranean area.

Libya:

British confidential reports indicate increased German activities in Libya within the past three weeks. It is noted that the Germans are apparently making practice non-stop air flights from points in Germany to Tripoli and return. This, the British believe, is continuously being done by German military pilots as the final step in their training courses. Reports also show that the Germans have full staffs of officers and mechanical experts already stationed at the most strategical points in Libya, and German military equipment and munitions have been arriving in quantities for weeks.

The German secret police, "Gestapo", are reported to have extended their activities to Libya.

The Italian colonists who were sent out to Libya in the latter part of 1938, are known to have received instructions to stand by for military service.

Another report shows that the Italians are taking every available native in the Fezzan regions of Tripolitania to points along the frontiers where they are doing forced labor in defense areas.

Latest British reports show that the armed land forces in Libya have only been slightly increased within the past three weeks, and at present there are probably

about

about 60,000 white troops and some 50,000 natives -- a few of whom have been sent from East Africa. There have also been certain increases in the air forces stationed in the colony. Some twenty Italian C.R. 32 bombing planes arrived recently from Italy and took up post at the new air base some ten miles south of Tobruch.

Confidential British reports from Rome indicate that the German and Italian staffs are considerably concerned as to the vulnerability of Libya from attack by the French in Tunisia. This question is understood to have caused the recent visits there of Marshal Badoglio and Marshal Goering. It seems that the French plan provides for attack against Tripoli and surrounding oases which are fairly close to French territory whereas the British-Egyptian plan in the east is purely defensive due, undoubtedly, to the absence of water supply and military bases on the Egyptian side of the border line.

Dodecanese Islands:

The British services state that their agents report the Italians especially busy during the past three weeks sending shipments of special large steel air bombs to Rhodes in the Dodecanese for storage. The British believe that such shipments are for use against their oil bases in Palestine, at the ocean end of the pipe lines running from Iraq, and possibly against ships entering and leaving the Suez Canal. There is also reported to be a considerable number of Italian reenforcements of bombing planes stationed at Rhodes. The British also do not overlook the trouble they may expect for their fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Italian air bases in the Dodecanese.

Visit:

The recent visit to Cairo for twenty-four hours of the German Minister of Propaganda, Herr Goebbels, was, as announced in the Press, a matter of concern to the British. Confidential reports indicate that Herr Goebbels spent part of his time here in conference with the chiefs of the German and Italian propaganda services. Local German leaders have since expressed disappointment at Herr Goebbels' visit as it is reported that he did not give them the lead they expected.

Egypt:

The British report that they now have a complete mobile division, modernly equipped, stationed at Mersa Matruh. According to plans, the full responsibility of stopping any sudden Italian invasion from Libya will fall entirely on this division until such time as required reinforcements may arrive from stations in other parts of

Egypt and Palestine and possibly from the East as far as India. As a result of recent maneuvers in the Western Desert Regions, the Military Staff feel confident of the heavy task assigned to the mobile division.

British Air Forces in Egypt:

From confidential sources the following information has been obtained:

<u>Bombers</u> -	<u>Number of Squadron</u>	<u>Number of Planes</u>	
	113 (B)	12	Hinds to be replaced by Blenheims within a few weeks.
	211 (B)	12	Hinds to be replaced by Blenheims within a few weeks.
	45 (B)	12	Wellesleys to be replaced by Blenheims within a few weeks.
	216 (B)	12	Valentras to be replaced by Blenheims within a few weeks.
<u>Fighters</u> -	33 (F)	18	Gladiators.
	80 (F)	18	Gladiators.

Army Co-operation - 208 (HC) 18 Lysanders.

In Palestine  
but for Egypt  
(Emergency  
Service)

Bombers - 14 12 Wellesleys.

In Iraq but  
for Egypt  
(Emergency)

<u>Bombers</u> -	55 (B)	12	Vincents to be replaced by Blenheims.
	30 (B)	12	Blenheims.
	84 (B)	12	Blenheims.
	70 (BT)	12	Bombays.

In Malta but  
for Egypt  
(Emergency)

<u>Bombers</u> -	202 (GR)	4	London flying boats.
	212 (GR)	12	Bristol Boths. (sic)

In India but  
for Egypt  
(Emergency)

Army Co-operation - 28 (AC) 12 Andase.

Additional in Egypt (Royal Egyptian Air Force):

One squadron R.E.A.F. Army Co-op. Lysanders.  
One squadron R.E.A.F. Fighters - Gladiators.

Additional Aircraft in Middle East:

<u>Sudan.</u>	<u>Number of Squadron</u>	<u>Number of Planes</u>	
	47 (B)	12	Vincents to be replaced by Wellesleys.
	(Not given)		Gordon Fighting plane to Seagulls.
<u>Kenya.</u>	272 (B)	12	Wellesleys.
<u>Palestine.</u>	6 (B)	12	Hinds.
<u>Aden.</u>	8 (B) (F)	12 9	Blenheims. Gladiators.

Estimated number of military planes available for defense of Egypt:

Bombers . .	184
Fighters . .	<u>117</u>
Total . .	301

There are attached four enclosures which cover in considerable detail the opinion of British officials during the past year concerning the probable ability of the Egyptian armed forces in case of an important conflict in the near future. Such enclosures have been given to the writer on a strictly confidential basis.

Jay Walker.

Enclosures: As stated.

Enclosure No. 1 to Memorandum No. 20.

Secret despatch dated April 22, 1938, from Major General Cornwall, Chief of British Military Mission, to the Egyptian Prime Minister

Extracts

It is my duty to bring to the notice of your Excellency the highly unsatisfactory condition of the Egyptian Army and the very slow progress which is being made in its training, expansion, and reorganization. The Army is at the present time unfit for modern War, and, unless drastic changes are made, it never will be fit to defend the country unaided. That is not the purpose of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Unless the necessary changes are made without further delay I shall have to report the position to the British Government.

Reforms Necessary.

- (1) Political leader who will raise the military spirit of the people.
- (2) War Minister of really first class ability.
- (3) Revision of conscription laws.
- (4) Competent senior officers necessary.

General Cornwall wrote -- as in the War Ministry, so throughout the Army, persistent efforts are made to maintain the fiction that Egyptian officers are capable of carrying out tasks which are in fact quite beyond their powers. The Brigade Commander is supposed to be capable of commanding a Brigade, of preparing and directing tactical exercises and supervising training, when, in fact, he has practically no modern military knowledge at all.

Reforms Necessary.

Sufficient assistance at once from British for reorganization and training, while Egyptian officers are most in need of it.

Recommends that increased numbers of British officers join the British Mission although there is to be no impression of the fact that greater British control is necessary.

C O P Y

22nd January, 1939.

Personal and Confidential

My dear Pasha:

I feel that it may be of considerable assistance to you at this juncture if I send you a brief survey of the present state of the Army, the plans for its further expansion, and the principal measures which are necessary to achieve its efficiency. I propose to give you my views with complete frankness, and I hope that you will treat this communication as a confidential letter from a friend rather than as official correspondence. To appreciate properly the present position it is necessary to consider briefly what has happened in the Army during the past two years.

On the arrival of the Mission just two years ago the Army consisted of:-

11 Infantry Battalions.  
4 Pack Batteries of Artillery.  
1 Motor Machine Gun Battery.  
1 Field Section, Engineers,

an approximate total strength of 12,000, with an Air Force of about 30 semi-military aircraft.

The current year 1939 should see in existence in varying states of training and equipment an army constituted approximately as below:

	<u>Approx. strength.</u>
<u>An Air Force.</u>	
1 Bomber Squadron, 2 Fighter Squadrons, 1 Army Co-operation Squadron, 1 Bomber Transport Squadron: about 200 of the latest type of military aircraft.	2,000

A Frontier Force.

1 Light Car Regiment of 5 Squadrons	500
-------------------------------------	-----

A Mobile Brigade.

1 Light Car Regiment, 1 Light Tank Regiment, 1 Anti-Tank Regiment, 1 Light Artillery Regiment, 1 Field Squadron.	2,500
--	-------

An

Approx. Strength

An Infantry Division.

3 Infantry Brigades, each of 3 Rifle Battalions, 1 Field Artillery Regiment, 1 Medium Battery, 1 Field Company, 3 Machine Gun Battalions.	15,500
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An Air Defence Brigade.

2 Anti-Aircraft Regiments, 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, 1 Searchlight Regiment.	5,000
--	-------

A Coast Defence Brigade.

4 Coast Defence Batteries with Search-lights.	500
Labour and Employment Companies	<u>1,500</u>
Total . . . . .	27,500

The main difficulties which have had to be faced in the execution of this remarkable expansion have been the absence of officers of all ranks trained on really modern lines and of those technical tradesmen which form such an essential part of the modern army. At the same time the higher direction of the expansion has been hampered by frequent changes of the responsible Minister, by the practically complete absence of senior officers with adequate knowledge of the higher control of an army, and the lack of organization and efficiency in the War Ministry.

The progress which has been achieved must be attributed very largely not only to British efforts, but to the ability of Egyptian officers, N.C.O.s and men to learn, and their enthusiasm for their work.

You will no doubt have heard many complaints that the expansion of the Army has been too slow. This has been stated in Parliament and frequently repeated in the Press, but I think that those who express these opinions show a complete ignorance of what constitutes the strength of a modern army. They think in thousands of men instead of thinking in terms of the power of armament and the force of efficiency. The present Army is not much more than twice the size of that which existed on the arrival of the Mission, but I am prepared to say that with adequate training, and efficiency in maintenance, it would be ten times as strong.

In my opinion, on the other hand, the Army, so far from

from having increased slowly, has, if anything, been enlarged too rapidly. The consequences of this, in practically all units, is a shortage of officers, experienced N.C.O.s and properly trained tradesmen and specialists. As a result units are in the great majority of cases, ill-trained and unable in most cases to look after properly the valuable equipment which they have received. Nonetheless I realise that for political reasons such a rapid expansion was more or less unavoidable, and provided that certain measures are taken now, I do not think that in the end it will have had very adverse consequences.

The Five Year Plan.

It has been decided that further expansion of the Army is to be based on a Five Year Plan, of which a copy should be available in the Ministry. The principal objects of this plan are to expand the Army as rapidly as possible but at the same time to avoid the faults of the past so that, with the deterioration in the international situation there may be at least part of the Army fit to fight in the immediate future should it be required to do so. I should be wrong to conceal from you that the execution of this plan, within the period specified, is a task which will demand the greatest energy, the best brains and the most willing co-operation that the Egyptian Army can produce. If these conditions are not fulfilled one or both of two consequences will ensue. Either the force contemplated will not be raised within the time allotted, or it will be of such low efficiency that the vast sums of money will have been expended to produce a largely unsatisfactory result.

The execution of the plan is entirely dependent on certain measures being carried out. In all cases these measures have been recommended to previous Ministers on many occasions during the past two years, but even now it cannot be said that the recommendations have been accepted and acted upon.

The Reorganization of the Ministry of National Defence.

The first task is the reorganization of the Ministry of National Defence. To become efficient the Ministry requires two things. Proper organization and men of the necessary ability and experience to work that organization. I recently submitted to H. E. Hassan Sabry Pasha a scheme of reorganization based on that which obtains in our War Office in London, but adapted to the special needs of Egypt. I feel that you could not do better than give orders that this reorganization is immediately to be carried out. It has been thoroughly examined both by your predecessor and by some of his advisers, and I understand that only his resignation prevented its being issued

last

last week.

There is no doubt that officers of the necessary ability can be found to work this system, but this will not be immediately possible under the present system of promotion. On the other hand in order to avoid drastic measures it may be possible to achieve a workable system if suitable subordinates are selected, and a sufficient measure of British advice is accepted. There has always been a prejudice against the presence of British advisers in the Ministry of National Defence, though I am at a loss to understand why an Egyptian Brigade Commander can have a British adviser while the head of a branch of the Ministry of National Defence cannot. But I think that there should be no difficulty in providing the advice without the actual permanent presence of British advisers in the Ministry, providing that those who offer the advice know that they have your personal authority behind them, and that you expect that advice to be accepted unless, when the matter has been referred to you personally, it is decided that it shall not be so.

I must confess that I never felt that the system adopted by Hassan Sabry Pasha of centralizing so much control would ever produce really satisfactory results. In actual fact he was advised on almost all military matters by Sagh Messiri Effendi, rather than by his responsible advisers, the heads of the three branches of the staff. It is very possible that the advice given was equally good or even better, but it is not a sound system, and I strongly urge you to change it. The Chief of the General Staff has now under him two subordinates, both of whom have been trained at the Staff College, Camberley, and he has also one very highly trained British officer who is available to advise his branch at any time. The Q.M.G's department is the one which is faced with the greatest difficulties mainly arising out of the ordering and supply of equipment. I do not feel that Nasr-El-Din Pasha has at the present time sufficiently capable and experienced officers as his subordinates, and I would suggest that Sagh Messiri Effendi should become one of his staff officers. He would thus be carrying on work which he has to a great extent been doing in the past, and at the same time the Q.M.G. would be put in the proper position appropriate to his responsibilities. A British officer can also be made specially available to advise the department when required. The departments of the Adjutant-General and of the Military Secretary seem to me to need drastic overhauling and strengthening in their direction.

I make it a rule never to suggest the appointment of any officer by name unless I am specifically asked to do so, and I therefore make no recommendations as to the changes which should be made in the personnel of the Ministry of National Defence staff. On the other hand should you wish for my advice I am at all times ready to give it, and it will be completely impartial and aimed solely at achieving efficiency.

The Revision of the Recruiting Laws.

A second and most essential measure is the revision of the Recruiting Laws. Over 18 months ago the Mission recommended two things in this matter: the first a reduction in the period of service aiming at producing an adequate reserve as rapidly as possible, the second a system of voluntary service for a proportion of N.C.O's and technical tradesmen. Such a system obtains in every modern army in the world and efficiency is impossible without it. It was therefore, with a sense of very acute disappointment, that we read the revised Recruiting Laws and realized that they would not achieve the second of these essential objects, since they provided only for N.C.O's to extend their service for three years at a time and they make no provision for the re-engagement of tradesmen. If efficiency is to be achieved, it is essential that practically every N.C.O. of the rank of Sergeant should serve for 12 years, and, generally speaking, the same applies to tradesmen. The rest of this problem is financial: the N.C.O. prefers to go to the Police; the expert fitter or electrician prefers the garage or the power house. Therefore the only way in which these men can be induced to remain in the Army is by offering them conditions of pay and service which are superior to those which they can obtain in civil life. In the case of tradesmen, it is possible to engage men below the market rates of pay prevailing for a good man, but the consequences are that the Army is saddled with a man who is not capable of doing the work for which he was engaged.

The Control of Expansion.

In expanding any part of an army, the system is, as you are no doubt aware, to withdraw a portion of the personnel of an existing unit and fill up that unit and the new unit with recruits. If, when this process has been carried out, either unit has an unduly low proportion of trained personnel and an unduly high proportion of recruits, it will take unduly long before its training has reached such a standard that the unit is fit for war. There is a very pronounced tendency in the Ministry of National Defence to consider that new units can be formed, or rather that personnel can be withdrawn from existing units to form new units before they are properly trained. As an instance of this I will quote the case of the 8th and 9th Rifle Battalions. The personnel of these two units were taken to form a Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and an Anti-Tank Regiment. During the winter of 1937 it was recommended that the 8th Rifle Battalion should be reformed as an infantry battalion (withdrawing personnel from the other 7 battalions) in April 1939, and that the 9th Rifle Battalion should be reformed in April 1940 in a similar manner. Without the knowledge of the Mission both these battalions have been reformed already. As a result, officers and N.C.O's have had to be withdrawn

from

from the remaining 7 battalions who are in consequence reduced to a state in which it is almost impossible for them to make progress in their training. I bring this case particularly to your notice because I venture to hope that you will yourself exercise a strict control of the expansion of the Army under the Five Year Plan. Arising out of this plan, a programme was drawn up (copy attached) which showed how each unit passes through three stages on its path to full efficiency. In the first stage it is considered it will be fit only for internal security duties and the protection of vulnerable points, such as bridges and power stations. In the second stage it is fit to take the field but could only be employed on static defensive duties, such as the defence of Mersa-Matruh. In the third stage it should be fit for mobile operations of all kinds but it will not be possible for a unit to pass through these three stages in three years if an excessive number of its experienced officers and N.C.O's are taken away to form new units.

#### The Supply of Officers.

Another important problem is the supply of officers. In this matter I must confess that I think that your predecessor made an unfortunate mistake. It is essential that the supply of officers should keep pace with the expansion of units and if necessary the period of education in the Military College must be reduced to enable this rate of supply to be maintained. For example, in England the period of training at the Military Colleges, before the war and after it, was 18 months, but as soon as war broke out an abridged course lasting six months only was instituted. The situation in Egypt at the present time is very comparable to that of a nation expanding its army under war conditions. Unfortunately Hassan Sabry Pasha decided that as cadets could not be properly trained in the fullest sense of the word in less than three years, the period of training at the Military College could not be reduced, and although he modified this decision to some extent and after considerable pressure, the supply of young officers is still very much short of the demand. I would suggest that an estimate should be made of the officers required for the execution of the Five Year Plan, and that the course at the Military College should be so arranged that the number of cadets required in each year are passed out. Once the period of rapid expansion is passed, I am quite prepared to agree that a considerable longer period of training at the Military College is necessary.

In this direction the granting of direct commissions to graduates of Universities has been necessary in certain cases and will be necessary again in the future. Although the Military College can turn out a large number of Mulazimin Tani to fill vacancies in the combatant arms, there is not an adequate supply of trained officers for technical units,

nor

nor is it possible to provide all the officers required for the administrative services. For these purposes there is really no alternative to direct commissions. I would emphasise that, if the right sort of officers are to be obtained in this way, it is essential to make the terms offered sufficiently attractive. If this is not done, the officers required are not forthcoming and essential units cannot be raised. For example, in the Ordnance and Maintenance Corps, although there is an acute shortage of officers, no more candidates are forthcoming. The Ministry of National Defence is, in fact, competing in the labour market in precisely the same way as any other employer, and, in order to obtain what is required, must be prepared to pay enough for it.

#### The System of Promotion.

Under conditions of rapid expansion, the present system of officers' promotion on the General List is detrimental to their efficiency. It necessitates constant transfer of officers from one arm (sic) to the service of another and with the increasingly complex tactical and technical knowledge required, such a system is quite unworkable. I am submitting in the course of a few days definite proposals for overcoming these difficulties.

There is no doubt that for the higher ranks of the Army the only satisfactory system is one of selective promotion as is the case in practically every other country. On the other hand the working of such a system in Egypt would, I understand, present considerable difficulties, and I therefore do not propose to press for its adoption. However, I feel that I should place before you the salient features of the present system. No officer who is within the age limit is ever not promoted. As a result in the ranks of Lewas, Miralais, and Kaimakams there are broadly speaking two categories of officers, (1) those who are fit for the more important positions and (2) those who are not fit. As far as possible, or so it appears to me, those who are not fit are nonetheless promoted and given appointments in the Recruiting Department which has in consequence an unduly high proportion of senior officers and is therefore a highly expensive organization.

As long as it is realized that this is the price which the country pays for not adopting selective promotion, I have no further comment to make.

#### The Status and Conditions of Non-Commissioned Officers.

The status and conditions of N.C.O's stand in need of considerable improvement. If the best class of N.C.O's are to be induced to extend their service and at the same time they are to exercise the authority which they properly

should,

should, it is most desirable that their status should be removed from that of the private soldier on the same lines (though not necessarily to the same degree) as are those of the officers. I suggest, for example, that N.C.O's of the rank of Sergeant should have separate sleeping accomodations and separate messes from the men.

### Buildings.

In spite of the energy, drive and ability shown by the Director of Military Works, it is nevertheless a fact that the building programme lags behind requirements. I think this is most probably due to the system of placing contracts by the Ministry of National Defence, and lack of adequate staff in the office of the Director of Military Works, but whatever the cause, the fact remains that we lack buildings of various kinds.

The chief sufferers are the Royal Egyptian Air Force, who now have about 25 aeroplanes standing in the open, and are shortly expecting the arrival of 35 more.

### The Maintenance of Equipment and Vehicles.

I feel that the vital importance of maintaining all equipment and vehicles in a state of immediate efficiency for war is not really appreciated by the Army as a whole.

In order to train the necessary tradesmen and specialists required for the Army, a Boys' Trade Training School has been started. It is now at least 18 months since the inception of this scheme, and although the boys are there, as yet there are no barracks, few classrooms and totally inadequate workshops for training purposes. Further, the type of instructor is much below what is required. All these points have been the subject of repeated correspondence between myself and your predecessor.

As regards the maintenance of actual vehicles and equipment, I would point out that I am constantly being urged to produce more and more equipment for the Egyptian Army. Actually, it is very doubtful whether the Egyptian Army is yet able to maintain in a state of efficiency the equipment of which it is now in possession, or which it is about to receive during the next few months. In this connection, I would take the opportunity of mentioning three concrete cases:

- (a) The British Armament Artificer Quartermaster-General attached to the Mission has lately inspected the Field Artillery equipment which is on loan to the Egyptian Army from the British Army. He sums up his report with these words - "I feel safe in saying that, in the event of an emergency, there is not one gun which would stand up to

prolonged

"prolonged firing" - he then goes on to detail his reasons for this statement, and I should be glad to show these to Your Excellency any time you may wish to see them.

(b) One of the new tanks received a few months ago has been damaged to the extent of about LE. 200. The reason being that "gear oil" instead of the correct grade of oil was put into the engine, which was then run until it was entirely smashed up.

(c) Some time ago the Armourer Sergeant-Major attached to the Mission was sent to Mersa Matruh to inspect the machine guns of the two Egyptian Army Machine Gun Battalions stationed at that place. From his report it was clear that a large proportion of the guns were unfit for active service, many items were deficient - some of them, such as "feed blocks" being of the value of LE. 6.500 mms.

I feel it my duty to bring these matters to your notice, as, in my opinion, until the Maintenance Services of the Egyptian Army are in a sufficiently efficient condition, the introduction of a large amount of new equipment can only entail great expense to the Egyptian Government.

I have also obtained the impression that although the standard of behaviour in the Army is normally high, there is not a very strict sense of discipline in matters which affect its military efficiency. I refer more particularly to the care of equipment and the maintenance and use of mechanical transport. It seems to me that there is, throughout the chain of command, a tendency to regard slackness in this matter as more or less inevitable, and one very rarely hears of disciplinary action being taken against an officer or N.C.O. for such slackness. I would point out that the financial consequences of this state of affairs, though they may not be immediately apparent, will eventually be very severe, and the country will be faced with unnecessarily heavy bills for the renewal of equipment which has been destroyed by carelessness.

#### The Administrative Services Under the Five-Year Plan.

In the early days of the Mission, my predecessor was informed that the Egyptian Army would not require any British personnel to assist them in such administrative matters as the supply of food, petrol, and water, or in the medical services. Experience has shown that this is very far from being the case and in my letter No. M/77(Q) dated 17th November 1938, I have outlined what I consider to be the necessary expansion of the Egyptian Army Service Corps to keep pace with the Five-Year Plan.

It was agreed a few months ago that a British Royal

Army Service Corps officer should be attached to the Mission, and he has now arrived, but, if the plan mentioned in my letter No. M/77(Q) dated 17th November, 1938, is to be carried out with any hope of efficiency, then he will require the assistance of at least two British N.C.O's.

In this connection, I would stress the fact that, because a unit comes into existence, or because it is ready from a training point of view to fight as a unit, it is nevertheless impossible for it to take part in operations until the administrative services behind it are able to function effectively. We have now reached the situation in which the administrative services of the Egyptian Army are lagging so far behind the fighting units, that even the small number of the latter which are nearing readiness for war are not utilisable in an emergency except for completely static equipment. Battles cannot be won by units which cannot be moved or maintained.

You are probably aware that on the 1st April, 1939, a very small mobile force will be ready from the training point of view to take the field should an emergency arise, but it will not be ready from an administrative point of view unless the detailed recommendations mentioned in my letter No. M/154 dated 10th December, 1938, are put into effect forthwith. In this letter also are mentioned other administrative details which affect the Five-Year Plan as a whole, and they equally require careful consideration and early action.

The Position and Functions of the British Military Mission:

In conclusion I might with advantage give you a brief summary of the position and functions of the British Military Mission.

Broadly speaking the personnel of the Mission can be divided into a staff who act as advisers to the Ministry of National Defence and as controllers of the functions of the Mission, and on the other hand of officers attached to units who act as advisers to the Commanding Officers and instructors in various branches of military knowledge for which sufficient Egyptian officers are not for the present fully qualified. In regard to advice, I regard myself as the personal adviser to the Minister, and my Chief Administrative Staff Officer as adviser to Nasr-El-Din Pasha and Mustapha Bey Sadek. The "raison d'etre" of the Mission is to assist the Egyptian Army to reach a state of efficiency for war in the shortest possible time, but it is quite clear that this object can only be achieved if there is the necessary proportion of British officers and N.C.O's to the number of formations and units in the Army. Unfortunately this principle has never been properly

accepted

accepted and every additional officer and N.C.O whose appointment has been sanctioned has necessitated a long and occasionally acrimonious preliminary struggle. I feel that this is entirely wrong and that it should be possible to reach an agreed proportion between the size of the Army and Air Force and the size of the Mission which would make the approval of additional officers and N.C.O's automatic. There is no doubt that the present strength of the Mission is wholly inadequate if the Army is to reach a proper state of efficiency on the completion of the Five-Year Plan. As an instance of this I would mention the 7th Rifle Battalion in the Sudan, which I lately visited. This Battalion has been in the Sudan now for about 13 months. No British officer could be spared to accompany it as adviser, and in consequence it is now in a state of training which renders it incapable of carrying out even the simplest military operation by such a small sub-unit as a company or a platoon. I have no wish to see the Mission any larger than is necessary to be able to do its work properly. At the same time it is my duty to inform you quite clearly that unless there are sufficient British officers and N.C.O's available during the Army's expansion, it cannot be expected to reach the maximum state of efficiency required for the operation and maintenance of its valuable equipment. Nor will it be able within a reasonable period to take its proper share in the country's defence.

All the matters to which I have referred above have been the subject of exhaustive correspondence during the past two years and the relevant letters should be available in the Ministry for your perusal.

I hope that the survey given above will be of assistance to you in making a start of your arduous and vitally important task.

Yours sincerely

(Signed) G. N. MACREADY  
Chief, British Mission.

His Excellency  
Hussein Sirry Pasha,  
Minister for National Defence,  
Cairo.

Enclosure No. 3 to Memorandum No. 20.

(Correct Copy - ICG)

Ambassador Sir Miles Lampson to Egyptian Prime Minister --- dated February 16, 1939.

At the time of the illness of the Prime Minister, the Ambassador wrote to him about Italian reinforcements in Libya, and another subject which he had been turning over in his mind -- namely, the training of the Egyptian Army. "It is a question," he wrote, "which is greatly exercising General Macready and the British Commander in Chief". The Ambassador wrote that the Egyptian Army is not making progress towards becoming a fighting force for serious war, and is capable only of carrying out elementary and static operations. The reasons -- (1) shortage of competent officers, experienced non-commis- sioned officers and properly trained specialists. (2) arms and equipment are not kept in a state of efficiency, hence the Egyptian Government is spending money that is being wasted. A mere mass of men and arms does not make an army.

The Ambassador wrote that the Mission should be divided into two parts (a) training, (b) advice -- (a) to be enrolled in the Egyptian Army, and that further instructors were necessary. If General Macready's plan were carried out, 15 officers, 31 warrant officers, and 55 further sargeants were necessary; and 4 officers and 14 warrant officers for the Egyptian Air Force.

Enclosure No. 4 to Memorandum No. 20.

(Correct Copy - ICG)

British Ambassador to Foreign Office, London  
Dated March 17, 1939.

Extracts

Egyptian Prime Minister entirely agreed to suggestion made by British that instructors were necessary, but from a political point of view it really was a question of not increasing further the members of the actual Military Mission. The Egyptian Prime Minister was well disposed toward the idea of increased British supervision and control over actual training and he now considered that it was an issue for the Egyptian Minister of Defence to go into with General Macready and Sir R. Gordon-Finlayson, the British General Commanding.

The final British proposal was described as (a) a small advisory and administrative Military Mission, (b) a much larger cadre of British instructors and supervisors to be enrolled in the Egyptian Army.

CROSS-REFERENCE FILE

NOTE

SUBJECT

865C.20/47

For the original paper from which reference is taken

See 883.20/70  
(Despatch, telegram, instruction, letter, etc.)

Dated \_\_\_\_\_ From \_\_\_\_\_

To \_\_\_\_\_

File No. \_\_\_\_\_

14/10/2028



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Alexandria, July 1, 1939.

No. 1716.

Subject: Situation in the Near East, North and Central Africa, and Saudi Arabia.

Strictly Confidential

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
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TO THE SECRETARY  
HID → ONI (Confidence)  
C/S AUG 7 1939

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
STAFF  
AUG 4-1939  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
OF STATE

I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of a strictly confidential memorandum dated June 30, 1939, prepared by Vice Consul Jay Walker at Cairo, relative to the situation in the Near East, North and Central Africa and Saudi Arabia.

Respectfully yours,

*Bert Fish*  
Bert Fish

Enclosure:

1 - Copy of Memorandum No. 22 of June 30, 1939, prepared by Vice Consul Jay Walker.

In triplicate.  
file no. 820.02  
BF/icg

2  
Received

865C.20/48

Confidential

AUG 11 1939

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Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 1716 of July 1,  
1939 from the American Legation at Alexandria.

(Correct Copy - ICG)

MEMORANDUM

(Strictly Confidential)

No. 22.

June 30, 1939.

Libya.

The British services at Cairo have recently been giving considerable attention to Italian developments of the port and district of Bengasi. Up until the past three years Bengasi, with its exceedingly unfavorable low lying surrounding country, did not appear to offer prospects of becoming an important armed base for the Italians. According to British sources, the Italians have spent more money and extended more effort on Bengasi in the past two years than at any other point in Libya or East Africa.

*Note  
865c. 15b*

The once dangerous open harbor at Bengasi has been completely reconstructed with long causeways, naval facilities, and a harbor entrance affording shelter for ships from the open sea. Several military air fields have been completed nearby with large underground tank storage facilities and space for other military air equipment. Suitable land fortifications and artillery bases for port protection have been constructed at Bengasi, and great developments have also taken place at this point in the way of military barracks for troop accommodations. According to reports from good sources, Bengasi has assumed great importance in Italy's program of empire expansion in the Mediterranean area.

In British opinion, the Italian decision to make Bengasi one of the best equipped of their armed strategical bases in Libya may be found in its geographical position. Situated at practically the centre of the colony's coastline, it is considered the most advantageous point through which the Italians could maintain their lines of communications with the Mother country in time of war, and from which they would attempt to transport supplies over the newly constructed coastal road both east and west as well as to points in the interior of Eastern Libya such as the Oases of Giarabub and Cufra, in case of a defensive or offensive campaign against Egypt.

It is considered that the two remaining deep sea ports in Libya with protected harbor facilities for sea vessels are Tripoli, about 110 miles from the Tunisian frontier, and Tobruch, about an equal distance from the Egyptian border. Both ports are considered too close

to

to potential enemy territory for distributing centres in case of hostilities, and the lack of drinking water at Tobruch would be a decided handicap.

The latest British confidential reports indicate that the Italians intend to increase their forces in Libya by about 10,000 men, bringing the total number of troops in that country up to an estimated 120,000.

Abyssinia.

✓  
86 Sd. 00

The Chief of the British Air Intelligence Services at Cairo states that his latest reports on Abyssinia show that the Italians have made no headway in their program to bring the country to a peaceful basis. One report indicates that the Italian Commander at Gondar and five officers were captured by the Abyssinians who will not release them until two Abyssinian leaders held by the Italians are freed. According to other information, there are three leading chiefs who are heading the movement in various parts of the country. One chief, known as Ras Abebe Arragai, recently routed an Italian column near Bulga and inflicted heavy casualties.

The Italians are understood to have recently experienced unusually large losses to their air force in Abyssinia by accidents and fires which have occurred at their air bases. This situation, the British believe, is partly accountable for the recent request sent to the Egyptian Government by the Italians, for permission to fly three squadrons of fighting planes over Egyptian territory while the planes are en route from Libya to Eritrea.

It would appear that the British are extending their assistance to the Abyssinians. Three Abyssinian officials have arrived at Cairo from Abyssinia under British protection and are now in close touch with various British services here. One is described as a wireless operator and is admitted to be here for special training while the other two are being instructed in general military matters. The impression given is that these men are representatives of Ras Abebe Arragai, who is making an impressive stand against the Italians. All three have been furnished Egyptian documents for travel identity.

The British now confidentially admit that two depots have been established on the Sudan border for distribution of arms to the Abyssinians.

The writer recently talked with a construction engineer of the Shell Oil Company who has just completed some fifteen months service for his company at Djibouti, French Somaliland. Within the past two months, he made a three weeks visit to Addis Ababa. According to my informant, there was a complete lack of locally grown foodstuffs. Even potatoes were imported from Italy. It seems that the

Abyssinians

Abyssinians refuse to raise crops to sell to the Italians and the result is an excessively high cost of living.

In further describing conditions, my informant stated that the Abyssinians operate as raiders at night and that Italian armed convoys were attacked and destroyed near Addis Ababa during his visit there. Firing may be heard in the hills near the Capital every night after sundown.

The road work done by the Italian labor corps on the main route from Eritrea to Addis Ababa was described as excellent, but maintenance thereof was difficult in view of native raiders and of the heavy rains in summer.

My informant found an unexpected amount of discontent amongst the Italian residents. This was especially the case with those who had formerly resided in foreign countries and had returned to Italy in response to Fascist propaganda, later having been sent to Abyssinia. He was surprised to find that very little building construction had been done in the country by the Italians. High ranking Fascist officials now occupy the palaces of former Abyssinian leaders while the other Italians continue to live in deplorable housing accommodations. Italian civilian residents are nearly all small traders and not land colonists. Practically all the former foreign residents in Abyssinia have been compelled to leave, for one reason or another. My informant further stated that the general impression of all classes in Abyssinia was that the brutal administration of Marshal Graziani had made lasting enemies of the Abyssinians and that the Duke of Aosta apparently was attempting a milder native policy, but so far without success. To my question: "Where, in your opinion, are the Abyssinians getting arms to continue their warfare against the Italians?", my informant unhesitatingly replied, "From the Sudan".

The above statements verify certain facts regarding current conditions in Abyssinia noted from time to time in my memoranda from official British sources and are of interest in that they come from an independent source.

Central Africa.

"Ken" magazine of June 22, 1939, (pages 3 and 4 of the green sheets) published an alleged "alternative plan" of the German General Staff for a movement to be conducted with lightning suddenness by mechanized German and Italian troops now in Libya, southwestwards across the Lake Chad country to seize the Cameroons. The article in question noted that, wild as it may seem, the plan is not militarily and geographically absurd. Considering existing forces in Libya, it would, in fact, be possible for them to cross the southwest Libyan border and disappear into the Chad country and at least reach the Shari River and Fort Lamy before anyone in London and Paris was certain of what had happened.

8629.00

The American wife of the French Administrator at Abeshr

(Abeche),

(Abeche), a northeastern district of French Equatorial Africa, recently passed through Cairo. She had made the trip to Egypt by crossing into the Sudan from Equatorial Africa and traveling by motor truck, with stops at El Fahser and El Obeid before reaching the Nile for the journey to Cairo.

The lady in question spoke as if the German-Italian proposed campaign into Central Africa was well known to the French colonial authorities in those districts. She stated that for months the French had been sending additional native troops to posts in northern Equatorial Africa, and great quantities of arms and munitions had been sent there. She also stated that the French administrators in Equatorial Africa were experiencing considerable difficulties with Italian native agents who had been sent into their districts from Libya to stir up trouble with the native residents; also that many arrests had been necessary and a firmer hand was being taken in the matter by the French.

A glance at a recent map shows that the present southern Libyan boundary extends south to the Tibesti Mountains. The last water hole on the Italian side of the line is at Sarra, where the route leads off to Tekro just over the French Equatorial line, thence into the Ennedi hills and south past Arada, Abeshr and Am Dam, and west to Fort Lamy on Lake Chad. From that point, there are numerous routes which could be followed to the northern districts of the Cameroons.

My informant, who has traveled with her husband to a great many districts in West and Equatorial Africa and made a twenty-eight day trip across the Sahara last year described the Cameroons as the most desirable part of Central Africa for natural resources and a worthwhile prize for any European country.

It is interesting in this connection to note that for a number of years, high ranking Fascist officials have been known to show interest in the Lake Chad country. During the writer's assignment at Tripoli in 1935-1937, Marshal Balbo flew from Libya to Lake Chad on a sightseeing tour. Several months thereafter a motorized Italian column made an experimental trip from Bengasi to Cufra and as far south as Tekro, across the French line. The trip at that time was described in the Italian press as an experiment to see if a practical motor trade route could be established with points in Central Africa.

#### Saudi Arabia.

For some considerable time British reports have indicated that the Italians were active in Yemen, and that the Imam of Yemen had accepted military tanks and other equipment from the Italians as gifts, apparently to the annoyance of the British who have special interests in that area. On the other hand, British reports about Saudi Arabia have always indicated that the Italians had made no headway

in extending their influence in that country but that Ibn Saud, the ruler, had refused offers of Italian assistance.

Mr. William J. Lenahan, representative of California Arabian Standard Oil Company, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on a recent visit to Cairo, informed the writer that several months ago Ibn Saud had accepted the gift of three Italian military planes, and immediately thereafter a mission of some twenty Italian flyers arrived at Jeddah to train Arabian pilots. After a very short stay, the air field was closed by Ibn Saud's soldiers and the Italian airmen forced to leave the country.

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Mr. Lenahan was of the opinion that British pressure induced Ibn Saud to release the Italian Air Mission.

Press Reports.

The Chief of the British Air Intelligence Services at Cairo advised the writer that an official change of policy has been authorized covering distribution to the press of items relative to British preparation of national defense. It seems that henceforth news items will be released from official British sources tending to report that the campaign of preparedness is progressing according to plans and that the Empire and its Allies are not as defenseless as certain press writers report. This would probably account for the recent sharp replies in the Egyptian-British press answering the published statements of Mme. Tabouis (considered by the Cairo British Services to be the unofficial mouthpiece of the French Foreign Office). The press replies were to the assertion by Mme. Tabouis that Egypt and the Sudan were defenseless, and to other reports from the same source concerning German designs on Arab States, following the recent Hitler-Khalid (Saudi Arabia) talks in Germany. Articles deprecating the lack of British policy will not, in the future, remain unanswered in the hope that it will tend to awaken the British public at home and abroad. The Services at Cairo now feel that a continuation of the old policy of failing to respond merely keeps the public in a state of unnecessary tension and, in their opinion, is considered politically unwise for the present British Government. In the future, we may expect considerable counter propaganda from British sources.

JAY WALKER

# CROSS-REFERENCE FILE

## NOTE

### SUBJECT

Military defense of Libya:  
Encloses clippings from THE DAILY TELEGRAPH AND  
MORNING POST, London, England, concerning - .

For the original paper from which reference is taken

See ..... Despatch #177  
(Despatch, telegram, instruction, letter, etc.)

Dated July 27, 1939 From | Tunis (Heisler)  
Tb/

File No. 851s.20/18

865C.20/49

Tunis, Tunisia, July 27, 1939.

SUBJECT: Military Defenses of Tunisia and Libya.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

SIR:

I have the honor to transmit herewith, for the Department's information, three clippings from THE DAILY TELEGRAPH AND MORNING POST, London, England, dated April 29th, May 8th and June 19th, 1939, relative to the military defenses of Tunisia and Libya. The clippings give some interesting details of the preparations taken by the French and Italians for the defence of the two countries, and the resources and natural advantages of the countries, from a military point of view, are compared.

It is believed that the enclosures constitute informative supplements to reports from this office regarding Tunisia and Libya, forwarded to the Department during the past eight months.

Respectfully yours,

Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

Five copies to the Department.  
One copy to the EMBASSY, Paris.  
One copy to the EMBASSY, Rome.  
One copy to the Legation, Tangier.  
One copy to the Consulate General, Algiers.

# FRANCE'S STRONG DEFENCE BARRIERS IN SOUTHERN TUNISIA

## A Visit to the Mareth Line that Guards the Way from Libya

By GEORGE L. STEER

In articles published on Wednesday and Thursday, Mr. Steer, who is visiting North Africa specially for "The Daily Telegraph," examined the political aspects of the Tunisian question. He is now on his way south from Tunis and describes below France's defences as one approaches the Libyan border.

We are in the South Tunisian autocar, which in spite of its grand name is but a country bus. We are travelling, as Italy might one day like to travel, towards the Mareth line. We have captured and passed Medenine.

Avanti! But the French reservist in the dusty beret at my side, who, like me, has been examining the forward defences of Tunisia, has relapsed into his book. The young woman in profound mourning, who kissed good-bye to the red-fezzed Zouave with the blue eyes in Medenine-square, is temporising with one of her excited children.

### GUNS COVERING THE ROAD

On my left non-commissioned officers of the forward echelons are returning to base headquarters at Gabes, looking very set and military.

On the left is the bare brown range of the Matmatas, rising, my map says, to 700 metres; and, as I know, they are formidable things to master at their base, for they start suddenly from the Jeffara, or coastal plain, at gradients which stagger an ordinary car; and their heights bristle with artillery, heavy and light, covering the single road of the coast, that along which we are travelling, between Ben Gardane, Medenine, Mareth and Gabes. After a point east of Medenine, indeed, they take it in the



French military lorries in the Tunisian defence zone.

most uninviting enfilade. But from here they look perfectly innocent; the ribbing of their brown slopes in the sudden descent to the plain stands out like water from a weir.

To the north the sea of the Little Syrtes, where Ulysses nearly came to grief with the lotus-Eaters, is a blue hem on the horizon. The coast is too shallow and treacherous for landings here, as even he knew. And between the coast and the mountains now, as one is

approaching the village of Arram, one can see the whole plain, and with it the whole character of the country which Italy will have to tackle if she chooses to invade Tunisia, Mareth itself lying in a long strip of palm gardens some six kilometres farther on.

The plain here is not level, as it is the southern side of the Matmatas, or as it becomes when it approaches their northern skirt. If one took Salisbury Plain by the edges and pulled it out a bit north and south to moderate the more extravagant bulges, and in the folds planted the typical waterless, white-bottomed rocky riverbeds of North Africa that the French call Oueds and we Wadis; then filled these trenches and their sides with palms which, for all their numbers, bear most indifferent dates; with a sprinkling of olives and fig trees; having done this, one has a rough idea of the coastal plain of Mareth.

Between the Oueds, which at rare intervals of rain drain the Matmatas in parallel lines northward to the sea, the plain rolls gently over a hard African surface. Camouflage here is easy, for the land, after the harvest has been taken up (the dwarfed barley, scarcely 15 inches high, is being cut this month of April), is a light khaki, sprinkled with grey tufts of hard bush like mange, and pointed at longer intervals with hillocks that have been whirled out of sand by the winds from the Little Syrtes and then tacked down by scrub.

### TRAPS AND BARBED WIRE

To-day these natural casemates stand queerly out of the random and shapeless barley fields; they are never cultivated, for they contribute to the solidity of the ground; for the casual traveller it is difficult to tell which is marked out to shelter an automatic weapon and which not. That, and the round peeling tombs of the Marabouts (Arram in particular seems to have been a centre of much past sanctity), and the black tents of the Berber Bedouin humped on the gravel, like camels at rest, are all that the invader sees before he comes, on the brink of the Oued Zigzaou, right against the first great barbed wire entanglements of the Mareth line.

The eastern, Tripolitan side of the Oued crumbles away in great blocks to cut the terrain against the mechanised arm. On the other side, behind many booby traps, the wire presents an enormous first barrier. And behind this first line, with its more obvious block-houses and gun-emplacements, the system of the Ligne Mareth is, along the road, some kilometres deep until it reaches its base communications in Mareth village.

"You are not to imagine," I was told by one of its chief architects in Gabes, "that it is a Ligne Maginot. But it embodies all the lessons of modern defence, and its calculations are based upon the means of the 'Monsieur' who may come up to have a look at it."

It is a humble, troglodytic line, based on no great range of hills but on folds and tricks of the plain; on the Oueds and the long belt of palm trees that marches behind the Zigzaou down to the Matmatas at Toujane, here 40 kilometres from the sea. The cover, as well as the camouflage, is remarkable. When I passed through there seemed to be only a skeleton garrison, but it was full of troops. The shelters for the front and support line guns are indistinguishable bulges in the ground. The heavier artillery defence is half fixed, half mobile, as befits a war in the plain. The broadside of the Matmatas, from Toujane



Tunisia and the Mareth defence line.

to Foun Tatahouine, takes the attack in flank. The water resources in this hard country are well developed and well scattered; the garrison, besides, consists mostly of the army of North Africa and the Colonial Army, Arabs and Senegalese, who are better fitted than the white Italian divisions to undergo the privations of a semi-desert war when the wells are drying up, towards midsummer. The water, in spite of heavy recent rains, is already lower than it was a month ago.

As for numbers, the strength of the divisions occupying the Mareth line and its southern curtain wall in the mountains reaching down to Foun Tatahouine, or deployed in advance of the line towards the Libyan frontier, must remain an official secret. One can only say that they probably exceed the number that Italy, with due regard to her Egyptian frontier, could throw against the defences of Tunisia; and that the greater part of the army of Algeria appears to be already here, as well as the more mobile elements of the Legion.

### ADVANTAGES OVER ITALY

If further reinforcements are sent to Libya from Italy further reinforcements can come as quickly from French North and West Africa. The French strength in Tunisia, indeed, is not only a matter of fortifications running from the sea to Mareth, and from Mareth to Toujane, and from Toujane down the Matmatas to Foun Tatahouine; it is a matter of multiple communications, of resources of food, water and man power.

Though the Italians have built a superb coastal road in Libya, with branches from Tripoli to various points near the Tunisian frontier as far south as Nalut, facing Foun Tatahouine, in the range of the Jebel Nefusa, any map of North Africa will show the enormous superiority of Tunisia in alternative rails and roads leading to the south; and in an age of aerial warfare it is alternative communications that count, with the dispersal of stocks and men that they permit.

France is still multiplying her means; she is creating a direct railway line between Algeria and Gabes which bypasses Tunis. Except in aviation, where she still lags behind, her bases are as ready as her Mareth Line for the shock of war; and when one sums up all the factors one's first impression is that an attack on Tunisia defended as she is to-day, would be the first act of an imbecile.

In his next article Mr. Steer will describe the advanced positions of the Tunisian defence system.

# TUNISIA'S DEFENCES AGAINST INVASION FROM LIBYA

## French Confidence in Hill and Desert Strongholds

Mr. Steer, who is visiting North Africa specially for "The Daily Telegraph," described in a previous article how France's Mareth line in Tunisia bars the coast route which an invader might take from Libya. To-day he examines how an enemy might fare who chose any other route.

THE 40 kilometres of the Mareth Line from the Matmatas to the sea are the reduction to their last essentials of the defensive needs of Tunisia. That may sound odd, seeing that the frontier of Tunisia with Libya is between 500 and 600 kilometres long, and that the narrowest point of the waist of Southern Tunisia, along the latitude of Tozeur-Gabes, is 225. But it is a fact, fixed by deserts, mountains, lack of roads, and gravel plains without water.

For this the Sahara is in the main responsible. The Eastern Erg of the Sahara, a region of dunes impenetrable by any large force carried on wheels, bites into the southern frontier of Tunisia from Southern Algeria, and nearly reaches the Matmata range; thence it curves south until it washes up against Libyan Ghadames.

It thus excludes from the combat, except for small forces carried by camels and easily dispersed by aviation, almost the whole of the territory south of the bare range of mountains, which form a crescent round the shallows of the Little Syrtes, from Gabes to Tripoli—the range called in Tunisia the Matmatas, and in Libya the Jebel Nefusa, with their corresponding strong points of Foun Tatahouine and Nalut.

### ROMAN MILITARY SECRETS

It is one of the curiosities of travel in this zone that, beside the military secrets of to-day, those of 1,700 years ago are now—in their shaky fragments—exposed. Here in the middle of the third century A.D. was built the "limes Tripolitanus" of the Roman Empire at the beginning of its decline; to protect its teeming colonies and "municipia" to the north against the Berber raiders of the desert, who had found a new means of attack upon civilisation since the Emperor Septimius Severus introduced the Arabian camel to Africa at the turn of the 200's.

Remada (north-east of Bordj Le Boeuf), Ras el Ain or Tlalet (to the north of Foun Tatahouine, once the Roman Talalati), and Ksar Tarsine (west of the central Matmatas, once the Roman Tibubuci), all play their part in the defence of Africa past and present. The casemates, by art, the little square forts, by age and the Arab, are almost equally effaced. The only difference is that France faces a possible enemy in the East, not from the sands. The "limes" is not a frontal guard, but a flank guard to the Matmatas. They, where they are fortified round Foun Tatahouine, are the flank guard—the Verdun—of the Mareth Line.

### UNINHABITED STONE WASTE

I spent a day or two looking at this country; the fortress of Foun Tatahouine and its glacis on the southern side, facing and gradually dissolving into the Erg. An engaging Jew called Raphael, dressed in Turkish bloomers and Japanese shirt, and with a towel round his head for a turban, drives an old lorry round this area three times a week with the post, and bread made in Tatahouine for those white officers who have been relegated with their

By GEORGE L. STEER

Goums (local patrols) to the semi-desert. He took me for a drive, and for a song, to Bordj Le Boeuf. This is the last of the useful water-points before Dehibat, a frontier outpost.

The country is quite different here from the coastal plain the other side of the Matmatas. One travels over a vast desert of gravel as level as a floor. Isolated pink-brown mountains, crowned with solid rock like South African kopjes but their sides a herbless rubble—like sand dropping from the hour-glass, escort the road on either side. But for a few nomads with their flocks of black Barbary goats, the country is uninhabited between the

by an advance along the crests of the Matmatas; or a direct attack on the Mareth line, by the coastal road of Ben Gardane and Medenine.

The French attitude is that the first is less probable than the second, for two reasons. First, because Ben Gardane with its offshoot to the south, Ksar Morra, has itself been developed into a fortress of great strength, from which a counter-attack to the south, with the road to Medenine as baseline, can easily be organised with damaging effect upon the other side; and secondly, because Foun Tatahouine is to-day probably the strongest single position of defence in Africa.

Here France has taken a tip from the local inhabitants, who at least since the fifth century B.C., when Herodotus described their weird municipalities,

have lived in caves carved under the summit of the mountains; the only real difference to-day is that they furnish them with bedsteads from Birmingham. These Berber troglodytes, with their advanced ideas on A.R.P., could take on Sir John Anderson and Professor Haldane together with one hand tied behind their backs.

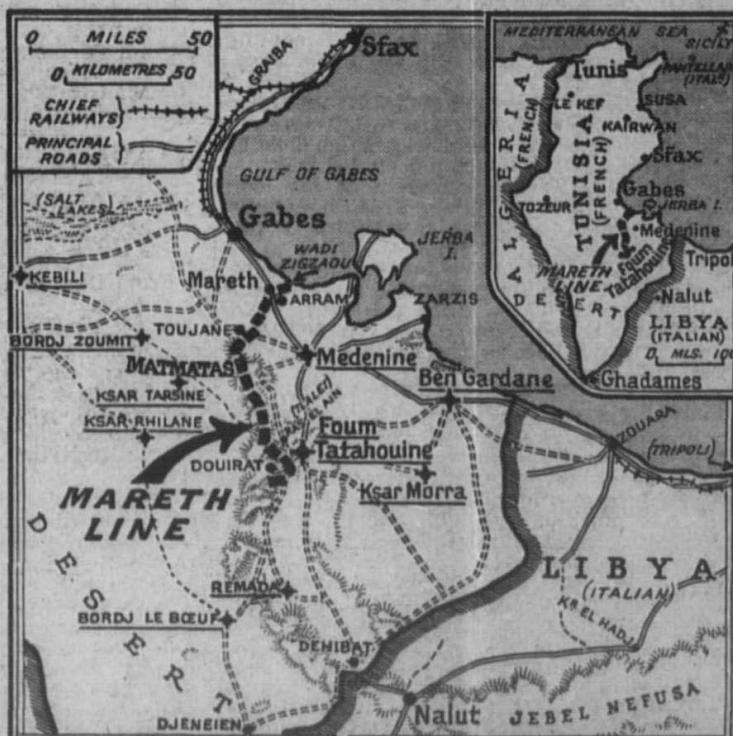
The French have borrowed their notions: in the tops of the gaunt hills round Tatahouine there must have been more military tunnelling in the last six months than in as many centuries of Barbary. In the little town built by the French below there is enough infantry and cavalry to protect this inland Gibraltar of the brown cliff-crowned mountains from surprise; the artillery seems to be invulnerable to the

only danger to heavy guns, that is, air attack.

Thus of the three possibilities, there is left the attack upon the Ligne Mareth as the most plausible strategy—or the least absurd. But the attack on the Ligne as I have described it is not a single operation. First the fortress of Ben Gardane must be overwhelmed, and the coastal road cleared; then Medenine, the knot of the communications between Mareth, Tatahouine, Zarzis and the island of Jerba must be untied—which again demands the Gordian method, for Medenine is also fortified across its web of roads.

### STILL THE MARETH LINE

Meanwhile powerful cavalry and mechanised units, at present based in front of the Ligne, are manoeuvring in the 8,000 square kilometres of plain which stretch between Ben Gardane and Mareth; and the artillery in the south are striking up a nasty tune. The Ligne Mareth itself is only a last shock. Its wide net of trenches and the bristling khaki fringe of excavation along the Matmata crests remain to see if there will be any takers.



Southern Tunisia, including the Mareth Defence Line. The names of strong points in the frontier zone are underlined. Inset: Tunisia and adjoining territory.

military posts, which are some 50 kilometres apart. A low wiry scrub, with starry flowers of purple only visible when you stoop, gives the stone waste an unreal bloom.

Mobile units assure the defence of this point. They can give a good account of themselves against anything but a mass attack. And since the hills round Tatahouine bristle with heavy guns that forbid access to the Matmatas from Nalut, Bordj Le Boeuf may in the end have to face a heavy attack from the Nalut sector. It will receive support from more regular units. And if the attack on Tunisia attempts to develop a turning movement on the Tatahouine salient by the west, it has only a single wretched track on which to advance, and 100 kilometres of completely waterless gravel to cross until it gets to Ksar Rhilane, the next collection of wells, where more surprises are in store.

So, the French believe, the Mareth line, with its continuation in the mountains down to Tatahouine, cannot be turned from the south. There remain two possibilities; the direct attack on Tatahouine, in order to break the principal artillery nucleus and roll up the line

# ITALY'S PLANS FOR THE DEFENCE OF LIBYA

## Striking Contrasts With French Strategy in Tunisia

By GEORGE L. STEER

Mr. Steer, who has been visiting North Africa specially for "The Daily Telegraph," to-day describes Italy's defences in western Libya. He draws some interesting contrasts with France's Tunisian fortifications on the other side of the frontier, which he dealt with in detail in two articles published on April 29 and May 8.

In a subsequent article Mr. Steer will outline Italian preparations on the eastern (Egyptian) border of Libya.

I HAVE just spent a short fortnight in Libya, half in Tripolitania and half in Cyrenaica. In that time I covered the whole length of the territory from Ben Gardane in Tunisia, the last great fort of the French, to Sollum in Egypt, the Anglo-Egyptian frontier "eye" for the elaborate defences which the joint forces of Britain and Egypt are constructing at Mersa Matruh.

Marshal Balbo and his representatives were extremely hospitable. I was naturally accompanied wherever I went, and the only places which I was not encouraged to visit were on the eastern frontier: Kufra (probably because of its immense distance from the coast), the Oasis of Jarabub, some 200 miles south of the coast facing the Egyptian oasis of Siwa, and the encampment at Acroma, just behind Tobruch, where Gen. von Brauchitsch, the German Commander-in-Chief, had recently witnessed military exercises.

### Power of the Air Arm

In Tripolitania, on the other hand, I was allowed without question to descend to Nalut, at the western end of the Jebel Nefusa. Beyond here the Italians have constructed heavy defences comparable, if not in strength at least in strategic value, to those dug and cemented and gunned by the French round Foun Tatahouine.

First, the strength of the Libyan garrison. There are to-day, and have been since the end of January, three complete army corps in Libya, two white and one native. The 20th Metropolitan Army Corps, consisting of the two divisions, Sabratha and Syrte, each of the two regiments, garrisons Tripolitania; the 21st Metropolitan Army Corps, of the two divisions Cyrenaica and Marmarica, similarly subdivided, is posted in Cyrenaica. The Libyan Army Corps is divided between the two sectors.

Each army corps has, besides, its own heavy regiment of artillery, and each of the four infantry divisions its light and medium artillery. Each is also accompanied by a detachment of Bersaglieri and by a mass of military workers, who for the whole of Libya total about 30,000; their job is fortifications and military roads, but they are reservists under discipline and must be accounted as military potential, if inferior to the rest. Finally, there are two regiments of aviation, heavy and light, for each white army corps, making about 300 planes in all; the bombers are the speedy Savoia-Marchettis 79, the equally fast light attack-ships called locally "Ghiblis" (the ghibli is the violent dust wind that blows off the Sahara when least expected), various Italian fighters and, at a minimum, one squadron of German Messerschmitt Taifuns on the Tunisian front, handled by Germans.

Including military workers and native irregulars, the total of fighting men in Libya is about 120,000. The army corps are fully motorised and highly mobile. The aviation must be accounted the most powerful in Africa.

So much for generalities. The strategic problem of the Libyan Government involves forces on two major land fronts, as well as a



Libya, including inset of Tripolitania, showing frontier and defence centres.

covering force in the south, and another disposed along half her coastline. Though the great Litoranea or coast road inaugurated by Signor Mussolini in 1937 binds the two habitable areas of Libya in a strategic whole and enables rapid transfer of units from one frontier to the other, nature has built each side of Libya so differently that they must be considered apart; as the Italians consider them.

Italy's dispositions on the Tunisian front are plainly defensive. Travellers who were in Tripoli towards the end of last year tell me that there was then much boasting among the troops that to-morrow they would be eating their spaghetti in Tunis. I found no trace of this attitude. Relations with the French are strained, but, in my view, if the Italian high command (represented in Libya by Gen. Coana, Marshal Badoglio's chief of staff in Ethiopia) ever thought of an invasion of Tunisia they have long since given it up. The Mareth Line and Foun Tatahouine are far too strong.

Everywhere one finds indications of the defensive. But the Italian principle of the defensive is entirely different from that of the French. I have seen no sign of the trench system which is the basis of communications in the Mareth Line. The defence of Tripoli is assured by groups of artillery fortresses and anti-aircraft platforms dug into the sand at distances of anything up to six miles from each other, and strengthened by concrete, which has to be brought by ship from Italy.

The texture of the soil explains the difference of method. Though the maps make the French triangle of manoeuvre (Gabes-Dehibat-Ben Gardane) and the Italian triangle (Tripoli-Nalut-Zuara) look exactly similar; though the war-theatre, as it were, on either side of the frontier seems to be the semi-circle of a uniform plain, watched by the crescent of hills which stretches from Gabes to Homs; yet the maps give a false idea of this zone. The Tunisian side of the country is hard, covered with dry scrub and pierced from the mountain to the sea by Wadi-beds, offering the cover of their palms and the protection of their abrupt sides.

### Cover and Communications

The Tripolitan side is shifting sand rolled in waves by the wind, sprinkled along the coast by large oases, but inland showing little natural vegetation until it reaches the foot of the mountain crescent, the Jebel Nefusa. The Wadis are small and few. There are no natural lines of defence. Italy and her hard-working colonists have made heroic efforts to tack down this sand belt with Australian wattle, young olive yards, wheat irrigated from deep wells, the hard grass called by the Arabs "dish," which is planted in chequer design by the Forest Militia. But the labour has only begun; it will take years before the Tripolitan Jeffara is solid and trenchable. Until then the frontal defences of Tripoli must be positional rather than continuous, and must make up for the lack of cover by excellent communications. They have them.

Put briefly, the dispositions of Tripoli can be divided into three main parts, as follows:

First, on the coast road opposite Ben Gardane, Zuara is strongly defended by fortifications which cover not only the Litoranea but also the beginning of the road leading

south to el-Giosc and Nalut, and by Libyan troops. Libyan cavalry and irregulars cover the eight or nine water-points on this southern route. Heavy artillery defences and a large force of Libyan foot and cavalry protect the western approaches of Nalut.

The whole of this part may be considered the first line of the defence of Tripoli, breakable, perhaps at Zuara and along the southern road, but far more difficult to pierce at Nalut, where the great Jebel rises in magnificent khaki cliffs 800 feet high, and the defiles are cruelly narrow.

Secondly, the bulk of the white troops of the 20th Army Corps are disposed in large groups between the sally-ports of the Jebel at Giado, Jefren, Garian and at the ascent of the main road into it, where dizzy bends mount from the oasis of Bu Ghelil. They rely upon a double system of communications. One goes through the silver fields of esparto grass on the top of the Jebel; the other straddles the beginnings of the plain, running across the mountain feet at Tigi, El-Giosc, Sceccciuch, Gasr el Hag.

### Need in Men and Material

Thirdly, stretching from the coast at Sidi Bilal, only 19 miles from Tripoli, and continuing south to El-Azizia and thence southwest to Jefren, are the principal artillery defences of Tripoli; groups of gun-tumuli and casemates, with areas for mechanised and armoured manoeuvre between. Stretching from El-Azizia to Bu Ghelil, directly south, is a second line of artillery defence, with a third from Castel Benito, the military airport of Tripoli, south to the Jebel.

From these elements the Italian plan of defence is quite clear. In the event of war they foresee a French attack on Tripolitania (seeing that many of France's best colonial troops are at present in Tunisia). They are prepared to yield ground along the coast, where, in spite of the large oases, the water is not good; while holding fast to the Jebel at Nalut. Their stops are the artillery defences and the heavy aviation in the rectangle made by the sides 19 miles west and 62 miles south of Tripoli, and their counter-attack are the white troops gathered round the valley exits of the Jebel. The rest, they think, they can do by aerial bombing on the columns of attack.

It is a clever scheme. It requires a bigger outlay in men and material than its French counterpart, for two reasons, because Tripoli is a far more valuable target than Gabes and because the gap between Jebel and sea, which must be closed to guard it, is, at 62 miles, twice the length of the similar line needed at Mareth. This may in part explain the heavy disembarkments of artillery at Tripoli (100 guns recently in a single week).

On the other hand, Tripoli can be easily reinforced overnight from Syracuse in bulk: the distance is only about 310 miles, and the 17 boats which brought October's batch of 18,000 colonists to Tripoli left Syracuse one day, were in Tripoli the next, and landed their full complement in two hours. If such a mass manoeuvre is possible with untrained civilians, the present figures of troops in Tripolitania can be regarded as a bare minimum.

NO. 197

RECEIVED  
5  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
**AMERICAN CONSULATE**

ADVISER ON POLITICAL RELATIONS  
MR. DUNN  
SEP 7 1939

Tunis, Tunisia, August 24, 1939.  
1939 SEP 5 PM 4:18

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORDS  
SEP 13 1939  
SEP 18 1939  
SR DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Reca  
SEP 8 1939  
US av. file  
DIVISION OF  
NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: No Troop Activities in Libya.

1-1055

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

SIR:

I have the honor to state, for the Department's information, that the present war tension in Europe has not, according to the statement of officials at the Residence General, Tunis, been followed by any new movements of troops in the neighboring colony of Libya.

So far as has been learned, no troop activities are taking place near the Tunisian border and the total number of troops in Libya is not being increased at this time.

The military authorities in Tunisia do not believe Italy will move troops in Libya against this country, even though war breaks out in Europe. They are of the opinion that Italy realizes an attack of the kind would prove futile.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
OF STATE

SEP 7 1939

Very truly yours,

*Charles H. Heisler*

Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

Five -----

SEP 16 1939  
FILED

865C.20/50

Five copies to the Department of State.  
One copy to the American Embassy, Paris.  
One copy to the American Embassy, Rome.  
One copy to the American Legation, Tangier.  
One copy to the American Consulate General, Algiers.

800.

CHH/ar.

# TELEGRAM RECEIVED

REB

This telegram must be closely paraphrased before being communicated to anyone. (br)

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

103, September 7, 10 a. m.

From a usually reliable source I am confidentially informed that Italy has recently sent two divisions of metropolitan troops to Libya and it is estimated that Italy now has 129,000 troops in that country of which 97,000 are white. However, yesterday the British Ambassador did not know of any such recent troop movement from Italy to Libya.

At the present time there are about 23,000 British troops in Egypt of whom 5,000 are Indian and the latter can readily be increased if it should be deemed advisable.

6/7.20  
6/8.20  
The British troops in Palestine are earmarked for Egypt. The British Ambassador informs me that his instructions are to do nothing that will in any way provoke the Italians in Egypt. The Ambassador feels that the Suez Canal is adequately protected.

From

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

SEP 9 1939

FROM (CAIRO) *SA*  
Alexandria DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Dated September 7, 1939

Rec'd 3 p. m.

RECORDED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
SEP 8 1939  
NSV 9/8/39  
SECTION OF  
MID EASTERN AFFAIRS

865C.20/51

SEP 11 1939

FILED

NM

REB

-2-#103, From (Cairo) Alexandria, Sept. 7, 10 a. m.

From a usually reliable source I am confidentially informed that the continued unrest of the Ethiopians is sufficient to enable the British if necessary to organize a major scale revolution in Ethiopia within a short time. The present strength of all Italian forces in Ethiopia is estimated at 204,000.

FISH

CSB

PARAPHRASE OF TELEGRAM FROM AMERICAN MINISTER,  
CAIRO, EGYPT, NO. 103, SEPTEMBER 7, 10 A. M.

---

I have been informed from a reliable source that two divisions of metropolitan troops have recently been sent from Italy to Libya. Italy is now estimated to have 129,000 troops in Libya. 97,000 of this number are white troops. The British Ambassador to Egypt, however, had not learned yesterday of any recent Italian troop movements to Libya.

About 23,000 British troops are in Egypt at the present time. 5,000 of this number are Indian troops. The latter can be augmented readily if deemed advisable. British troops stationed in Palestine are also available for service in Egypt. I have been informed by the British Ambassador that he has been instructed to take no action that will provoke the Italians in Egypt in any way. The British Ambassador believes that there is adequate protection for the Suez Canal.

I have also been informed from a usually reliable source that there is sufficient unrest among Ethiopians to make it possible for the British to organize a major revolution there if necessary. It is estimated that there are at present 204,000 Italian troops in Ethiopia.

# TELEGRAM RECEIVED

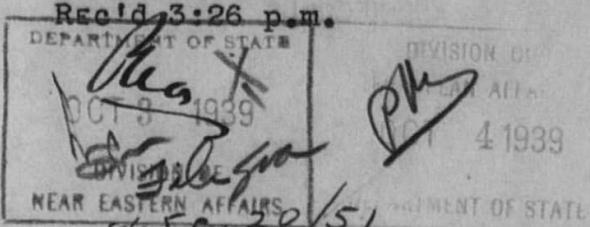
EG

This message must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone. (Br)

Paraphrase sent  
to ONI + MIO  
FROM Cairo Oct. 3  
Alexandria

Dated October 2, 1939

Secretary of State,  
Washington.



125, October 2, 3 p.m.

My telegram No. 103, September 7, 10 a.m.

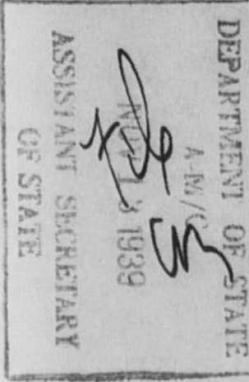
The British Ambassador confirms to me the report  
that Italy has recently increased her military forces  
in Libya. Vice Consul Walker's informant says there  
are now in Libya approximately 164,000 troops in-  
cluding 128,000 metropolitan troops.

FISH

CSB

FILED

OCT 5 - 1939



NM

865C.20/52

PARAPHRASE OF TELEGRAM FROM AMERICAN LEGATION,  
CAIRO, EGYPT, NO. 125, OCTOBER 2, 3 P.M.

Please refer to my telegram no. 103, September 7,  
10 a.m. I have now received confirmation from the British  
Ambassador of the report that Italian military forces in  
Libya have recently been increased. At present there  
are said to be in Libya approximately 164,000 soldiers,  
of which 128,000 are metropolitan troops.

865C.20/52

NE GVA/EG



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Bulkeley, Alexandria, September 7, 1939

CONFIDENTIAL

No. 1799.

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

OCT 16 1939

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Subject: Italian Troops in Libya; Defence of Egypt.

RECEIVED  
5  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

1939 OCT 5 PM 3 24

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

ADVISER ON POLITICAL RELATIONS  
MR. DUNN  
OCT 10 1939  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
filed  
OCT 7 1939  
DIVISION OF  
NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
OF STATE  
OCT 11 1939  
A/M/C  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

Referring to my telegram no. 103 of September 7, 10 a.m.,  
1939, I have the honor to further inform the Department that the  
information contained in the above mentioned telegram, stating  
that two divisions of metropolitan troops had recently been sent  
from Italy to Libya and the estimated number of the troops now  
in that country, was obtained by Vice Consul Walker from the same  
party with whom he has been conferring from time to time during  
the past eighteen months.

OCT 16 1939

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It

It seemed to me so improbable that Italy would be sending troops to Libya just at this time, that I called on the British Ambassador and, in response to my inquiry, he said that he knew of no recent troop movements from Italy to Libya. However, he stated that he had not been in touch with the military command during the last day or so. For the reason that in the past there has not always been the closest coordination between the military authorities and the Embassy, I concluded the telegram should be sent to the Department. Heretofore the party with whom Mr. Walker confers has been quite well posted.

The information with regard to Ethiopia contained in the last paragraph of the telegram under reference was also obtained from Vice Consul Walker, who had secured it from his usual source.

The information contained in the second paragraph of this telegram with reference to the British troops in Egypt and the comment with reference to Indian troops, was given me by the British Ambassador. He told me that the Egyptian Government was urging that more troops be brought now to Egypt. But, under the present circumstances, the Ambassador said it is the opinion of the military command that it is unnecessary to bring additional troops just at this time. It was the understanding of the British Ambassador that troops could be brought from India in such numbers and at such times as the future needs demanded.

A few days before the return of the Ambassador from leave, the British Minister made the same statement to me that the Ambassador has now made, namely, that the instructions from London were not to provoke or irritate the Italians. As a matter of fact, however, the Ambassador informed me that according to his latest information the British have no real assurance from Italy

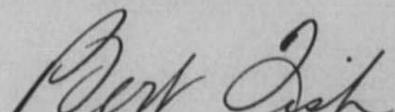
to

to the effect that she will remain neutral. The British fear a "benevolent" neutrality toward Germany on the part of Italy, and this would make it difficult for the British. Anyway, so far as Egypt is concerned, preparations are being made to meet the emergency should Italy later conclude to join Germany.

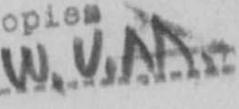
Some of the military authorities in Egypt are of the opinion that it would be better for Italy to join Germany at this time, thereby giving Great Britain an opportunity to be of some more immediate help to Poland by smashing through Italy and attacking Germany. When I mentioned this to the Ambassador he said that view was also held by some of the military authorities in London, but that the Government held the other view, that they would much prefer to keep Italy out of the war, provided, of course, she were in fact neutral.

With reference to the defence of the Suez Canal, the Ambassador seems quite confident that it will be adequately defended.

Respectfully yours,

  
Bert Fish

In triplicate   
File no. 820  
BF.alw

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LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Alexandria, September 18, 1939.

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

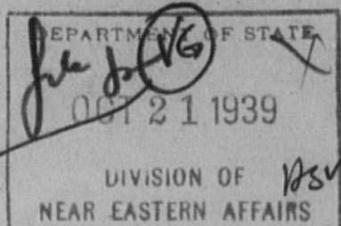
DEC 4 1939

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Strictly Confidential

No. 1818.

Subject: Military Situation in Libya, Ethiopia  
and Egypt.



Jay Walker

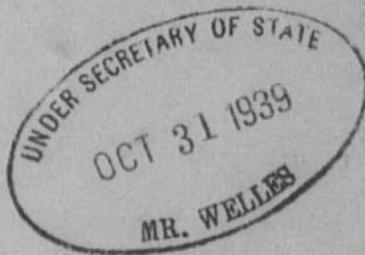
FOR DISTRIBUTION - PAGE Yes No  
to the public

MID

Nov 3 1939

OCT 5 1939

FILED



Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of a strictly confidential memorandum dated September 14, 1939, prepared by Vice Consul Jay Walker at Cairo relative to the military situation in Libya, Ethiopia and Egypt.

Respectfully yours,

Bert Fish

Enclosure:

1 - Memorandum no. 24 by Vice Consul Jay Walker, dated September 14, 1939.

In triplicate.  
file no. 820.02  
BF/icg

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Received W.V.A.

865C.20/54

Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 1818 of September 18,  
1939 from the American Legation at Alexandria.

(Correct Copy - ICG)

MEMORANDUM

(Strictly Confidential)

No. 24

September 14, 1939.

Libya.

Information from well informed sources indicate that subsequent to September 5, 1939, an additional 8,000 Italian troops have been landed in Libya. It is estimated by the same sources that there are approximately 137,000 troops in Libya, at present, of whom some 105,000 are Metropolitan forces. It is also understood in confidential circles that an additional 20,000 troops are being held at southern Italian ports for transportation to Libya, probably at an early date.

Abyssinia.

Latest confidential reports from Abyssinia show considerable troop movement amongst the Italian forces, which is believed unusual during the rainy season. There is known to be a heavy concentration of forces around Diradawa which, in the opinion of local military men, would indicate preparations for attack towards French and British Somaliland in case of hostilities with an outside enemy.

The Italian air forces in Abyssinia are believed to have some 236 fighting planes on hand, and a petrol supply sufficient for about three months' operations.

It is fully expected that the Italian air and naval forces could menace enemy shipping in the Red Sea, and effect serious damage on the Aden Colony where limited space does not permit a heavy concentration of air and land forces at that point.

Egypt.

Well informed sources indicate that there are about 33,000 British land forces in Egypt at present, including some 7,000 Indian troops which arrived several weeks ago. Further Indian troops are understood to be en route to Egypt at present. Contingents of Australian

and

and New Zealand troops are expected to reach Egypt about November 1, 1939. Egyptian troops, which number about 33,000, are to be used principally for the defense of lines of communication.

Reliable sources report that there are about 800 British and Egyptian fighting aircraft units held at bases in Egypt at this time. Four additional squadrons could be called for fighting service from other bases in the Near East.

War.

My informant advises me that reports from British political sources are about evenly divided as to whether or not Italy will enter the War on the side of Germany, whereas British and French intelligence reports tend more strongly toward the view that Italy will join her Axis partner in the War in about two or three months.

The Australian Government Commissioner at Cairo reports that the British Government have purchased all surplus supplies of Australian wool, meat and foodstuffs and that arrangements are now under way to provide transportation facilities. Part of the Australian supplies will be delivered in Egypt. Prices have been based on an average of those for the past three years.

JAY WALKER

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

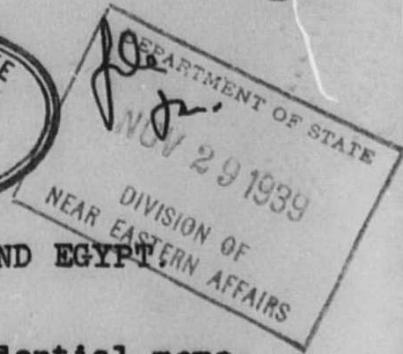


1939 NOV 29 AM 9:30  
OCT 23 1939

October 23, 1939

A-B Mr. Berle  
A-M Mr. Messersmith  
U Mr. Welles,  
S Mr. Secretary

DIVISION OF COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORDS  
MR. BERLE



MILITARY SITUATION IN LIBYA, ETHIOPIA, AND EGYPT.

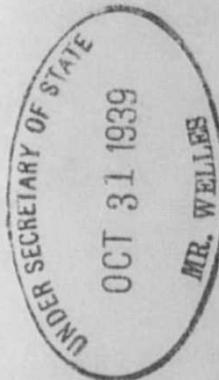
Our Minister in Egypt transmits a confidential memorandum dated September 14, 1939 prepared by Vice Consul Walker in Cairo on the military situation in Libya, Ethiopia, and Egypt on the basis of information furnished from British Air Intelligence sources.

Libya. An additional 8,000 Italian troops are reported to have been landed in Libya subsequent to September 5, bringing Italian forces in Libya up to 137,000 troops, of whom 105,000 are Metropolitan forces.

In a subsequent report from Vice Consul Walker dated September 25 Italy was reported to have a total of 164,000 troops in Libya, of whom 128,000 are Metropolitan forces.

Abyssinia. Heavy concentration of Italian forces is reported in Abyssinia around Diradawa. This would indicate possible preparations for attack toward French and British Somaliland in case of hostilities with an

outside



NOV 30 1939

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FW 865C.20/54

outside enemy.

Italian air forces in Abyssinia are reported to consist of some 236 fighting planes, with a gasoline supply sufficient for about three months' operations.

It is believed that the Italian air and naval forces in Italian East Africa could menace enemy shipping in the Red Sea and effect serious damage on the Aden Colony where limited space does not permit a heavy concentration of air and land forces at that point.

Egypt. It is estimated that there are some 33,000 British land forces in Egypt at the present time, including some 7,000 Indian troops. Contingents of Australian and New Zealand troops are expect to reach Egypt about November 1, 1939. Egyptian troops, which number about 33,000, are to be used principally for the defense of lines of communication. British aircraft units have been considerably augmented and it is now estimated that there are about 800 British and Egyptian aircraft fighting units at bases in Egypt.

General. Reports from British political sources reaching British Air Intelligence in Egypt during the first two weeks in September are stated to have been about evenly divided as to whether or not Italy would enter the war on the side of Germany. British and French Intelligence

reports

reports are stated to tend more strongly than British political reports toward the view that Italy will join her axis partner in the war in two or three months - that is to say, in November or December.

NE:JRC:CMM:SS



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Alexandria, September 25, 1939

Strictly Confidential

No. 1852.

DIVISION OF  
EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

NOV 30 1939

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Subject: Military Situation in Libya and Ethiopia.

RECEIVED  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
1939 OCT 19 PM 1 37

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

ADVISER ON POLITICAL RELATIONS  
MR. DUNN  
NOV 29 1939  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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OCT 21 1939 X  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF  
NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

FOR DISTRIBUTION - CHECK Yes No

TO THE SECRETARY

NOV 3 1939

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit the following paraphrase of a strictly confidential message, dated September 25, 8 a. m., 1939, which I have received from Vice Consul Jay Walker at Cairo, concerning Italian troops in Libya and the situation in Ethiopia:

"Reports from reliable sources state that, as a result of the recent reinforcements sent to Libya, Italy now has 128,000

Metropolitan

865C.20/55

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1939  
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Metropolitan troops there, which brings the total Italian forces to approximately 164,000 troops in that country.

"Italy is now believed to have 25,000 armed forces in the Dodecanese Islands.

"The situation in Ethiopia is reported to be unchanged."

Respectfully yours,

*Bert Fish*  
Bert Fish

X

In triplicate.  
file no. 820.02  
BF/icg

2 Carbon Copies  
Received ... *W.W.A.*

# CROSS-REFERENCE FILE

## NOTE

**SUBJECT** Withdrawal of troops from Egyptian-Libyan border.

Reports of - are without foundation.

865C.20/56

For the original paper from which reference is taken

See Tel. 142, 11 a.m.

(Despatch, telegram, instruction, letter, etc.)

56

Dated Oct. 18, 1939

From } Egypt  
To }

File No. 883.20/91



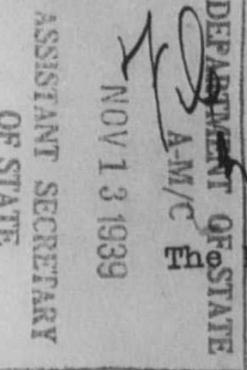
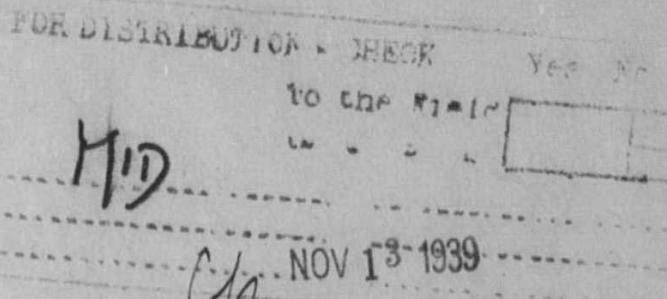
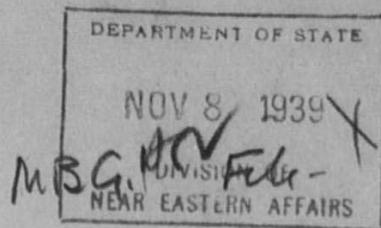
LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
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Alexandria, DIVISION OF  
1939 NOV 6 PM 2 30 EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
NOV 15 1939

Strictly Confidential DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

No. 1857.

Subject: Italian Military Forces in Libya.



The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch no. 1852 of September 25, 1939, transmitting strictly confidential information obtained by Vice Consul Jay Walker at Cairo, concerning the recent reenforcement of Italian armed forces in Libya, and to state, as reported in my telegram no. 125, October 2, 6 p. m., 1939, that the information

contained

1939 16 1939

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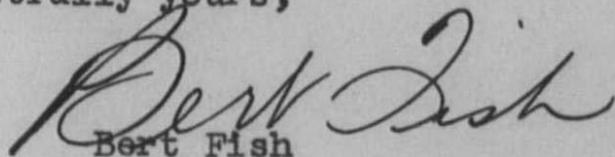
865C.20/57

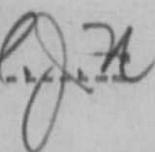
contained in the above-mentioned despatch was confirmed by the British Ambassador during the course of a conversation I recently had with him. The explanation given by Italy for this increase of its military forces in Libya is that they are to be used solely for defensive purposes in the event of an attack by the French on the west.

I am informed by a usually reliable source that the Italian forces in Libya have now been moved thirteen miles nearer the Egyptian frontier.

It is my understanding that the British Military Authorities in Egypt are not alarmed at this increase, presumably for the reason that, with Egypt on the east and France on the west, they feel they can cope with any eventual developments. Furthermore, the transfer of troops to Libya must necessarily mean an additional expense to Italy for the transportation of foodstuffs and other supplies.

Respectfully yours,

  
Bert Fish

2 Carbon Copies  
Received ..... 

In triplicate.  
file no. 920.02  
BF/icg



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Alexandria, October 10, 1939.

1939 NOV 6 PM 2 05

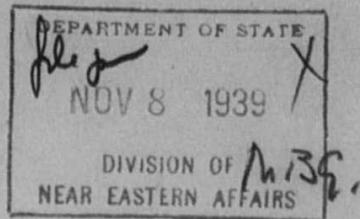
Strictly Confidential

No. 1882.

DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS



Subject: Italian Military Forces in Libya.



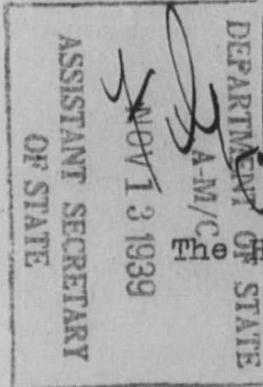
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FOR DISTRIBUTION & CHECK Yes No

To the main [ ]

in [ ]

NOV 13 1939



The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

In continuation of my despatch no. 1857 of October 3, 1939, transmitting strictly confidential information obtained by Vice Consul Jay Walker at Cairo, concerning the recent reenforcement of Italian troops in Libya, I have the honor to state that, according to a report from Mr. Walker dated October 9, 1939, the armed forces of Italy

now

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now in Libya are approximately 176,000 and of this total approximately 145,000 are Metropolitan troops.

According to Mr. Walker's informant the advance of the Italian forces toward the Egyptian border was made only after notifying the Egyptian authorities.

Respectfully yours,

*Bert Fish*  
Bert Fish

In triplicate.  
file no. 820.02  
BF/icg

2 Carbon copies  
Received *TP*



LEGATION OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

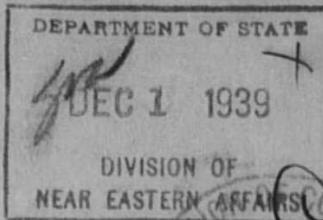
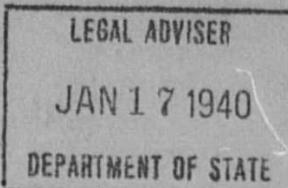
Cairo, November 4, 1939.

Strictly Confidential

No. 1902.



Subject: Italian Military Forces in Libya: Reports  
of British Intelligence Services at  
Cairo.



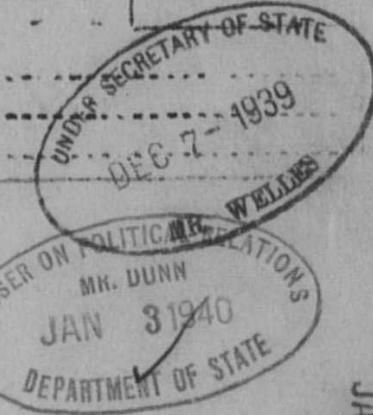
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
1939 DEC 1 PM 2 18  
DIVISION OF  
COMMUNICATIONS  
AND RECORDS

FOR DISTRIBUTION - CHECK YES NO

to the mail

JAN 5 1940



Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of a strictly confidential memorandum, dated November 3, 1939, prepared by Jay Walker, American Vice Consul at Cairo, concerning Italian Military forces in Libya, as well as certain reports of the British Intelligence

Services

JAN 23 1940  
FILED

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Services in Cairo.

Respectfully yours,

*Bert Fish*  
Bert Fish

✓  
Enclosure:

1 - Copy of Memorandum No. 25 of  
November 3, 1939, prepared  
by Vice Consul Jay Walker.

In triplicate.  
file no. 820.02  
BF/iecg

2 Carbon Cop 155  
Received *J. N.*

Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 1902 of November 4,  
1939, from the American Legation at Cairo.

(Correct Copy - ICG)

MEMORANDUM  
(Strictly Confidential)

No. 25

November 3, 1939.

Libya.

The latest British confidential reports indicate that there are approximately 183,000 Italian troops in Libya, including 152,000 metropolitan troops from Italy.

The news item which recently appeared in the Arab press in Cairo to the effect that the Italians had withdrawn their armed forces from advanced posts near the Egyptian frontier is reported, by the British, to be false. This incorrect report, according to the British, was furnished to the press by the chief propaganda agent of the Italian Legation.

Reports.

Reports shown to the writer, on a strictly confidential basis, by the British Intelligence at Cairo indicate the possession of evidence that the Germans have established a complete organization at Trieste, Italy, apparently with the approval of the Italian authorities, for the purpose of handling contraband goods destined for Germany. It appears that a good portion of such goods now reaching Trieste is carried on small steamers of less than a thousand tons, under the Greek flag. Such vessels manage to avoid the British-French blockade fleet by keeping inside the three mile zone around the Greek islands, and later enter the Adriatic Sea where the possibilities of meeting the blockading fleets are remote.

A further confidential report from the same source shown to the writer indicates that British political officials in Cairo have divided the population of Egypt into four groups of thought as follows:

(a) Egyptians of Turkish blood, principally members of prominent families, including princes and others near the Royal Family -- defeatists, and whenever openly possible, anti-British.

(b) Egyptians in the less wealthy classes, business and professional men, would like to see Britain and France win the war but hope to make personal fortunes through trade in war goods,

and

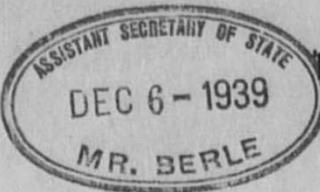
and wish Egypt to go no further than the present state of siege.

(c) Workers, land workers (fellaheen) interested in the war merely that it may increase their daily wage but not force them into military service.

(d) Levantine (Greek, Armenians, and other Egyptian Christians) sympathies change frequently for and against a prolonged war -- business opportunities paramount.

The writer has also been shown a translation from the German language of a copy of a report found by the British and Egyptian authorities in the personal effects of the head of the Nazi Party at Cairo after his arrest and detention when the War began in September 1939. The report in question was addressed to a member of the inner circle of the Nazi Party in Germany, marked for the attention of the Fuehrer. It recommended that Germany make an alliance with Russia at all costs and that when hostilities began Russia should join in dividing Poland. The writer of the report further believed that Italy should not be taken in as an active ally with Germany but held neutral where it would be of the greatest services to Germany. The British Intelligence services in Cairo hold the recommendations put forward in this report as remarkable in that they were transmitted to Germany by the head of Nazi activities in Cairo in the early part of May 1939.

JAY WALKER



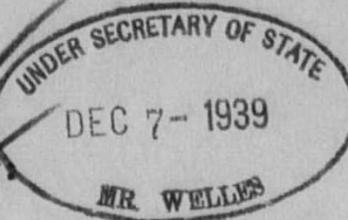
DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

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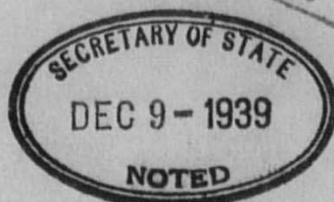
A-B - Mr. Berle:

U - Mr. Welles:

S - Mr. Secretary:



December 5, 1939



ITALIAN TROOPS IN LIBYA

According to British Intelligence reports made available to Vice Consul Jay Walker in Cairo and transmitted by Judge Fish, the American Minister in Egypt, in a despatch dated November 4, 1939, there are approximately 183,000 Italian troops in Libya, including 152,000 metropolitan troops.

The news item which recently appeared in the Arab press in Cairo to the effect that the Italians had withdrawn their armed forces from advanced posts near the Egyptian frontier is reported by the British to be false. The incorrect report is stated by the British to have been furnished to the press by the principal propaganda agent of the Italian Legation in Cairo.

Wallace Murray

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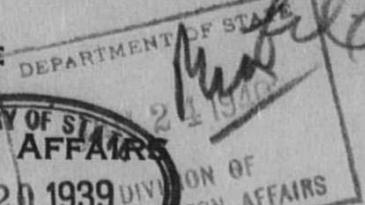
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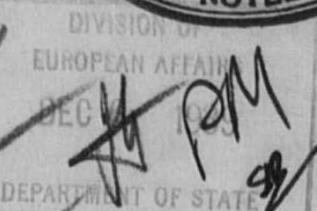
DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS



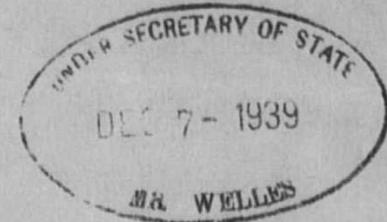
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Eu DIVISION OF COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORDS  
A-B - Mr. Berle:

U - Mr. Welles.S - Mr. Secretary.

✓  
H P M  
✓

CLEARANCE OF GERMAN GOODS THROUGH TRIESTE

According to British Intelligence reports made available to Vice Consul Jay Walker in Cairo and transmitted by Judge Fish, the American Minister in Egypt, in a despatch dated November 4, 1939, the Germans have established a complete organization at Trieste, Italy, apparently with the approval of the Italian authorities, for the purpose of facilitating the forwarding of contraband goods destined for Germany.

*WPA  
740.0012 Europe  
Nov 1939*

It is stated that a considerable portion of such goods, which are now reaching Trieste, is being transported on small steamers of less than a thousand tons, under the Greek flag. Such vessels are said to keep inside the three mile zone of the Greek coastline and to pass thus into the Adriatic Sea, thereby avoiding the British-French blockade.

Wallace Murray

NE JRC/LS

JAN 8 1940  
RECD BY  
[Signature]

FM 865C.20/59

Central File: Decimal File 865C.20, Internal Affairs Of States, Military Affairs. Army. Army Posts. Fortifications. Defenses. Military Instructors (Advisers). (\*\* Country In Which Serving.), October 22, 1937 - December 5, 1939. October 22, 1937 - December 5, 1939. MS European Colonialism in the Early 20th Century. National Archives (United States). Archives Unbound, <link.gale.com%2Fapps%2Fdoc%2FSC5109726207%2FGDSC%3Fu%3Domni%26sid%3Dbookmark-GDSC>. Accessed 18 June 2025.